

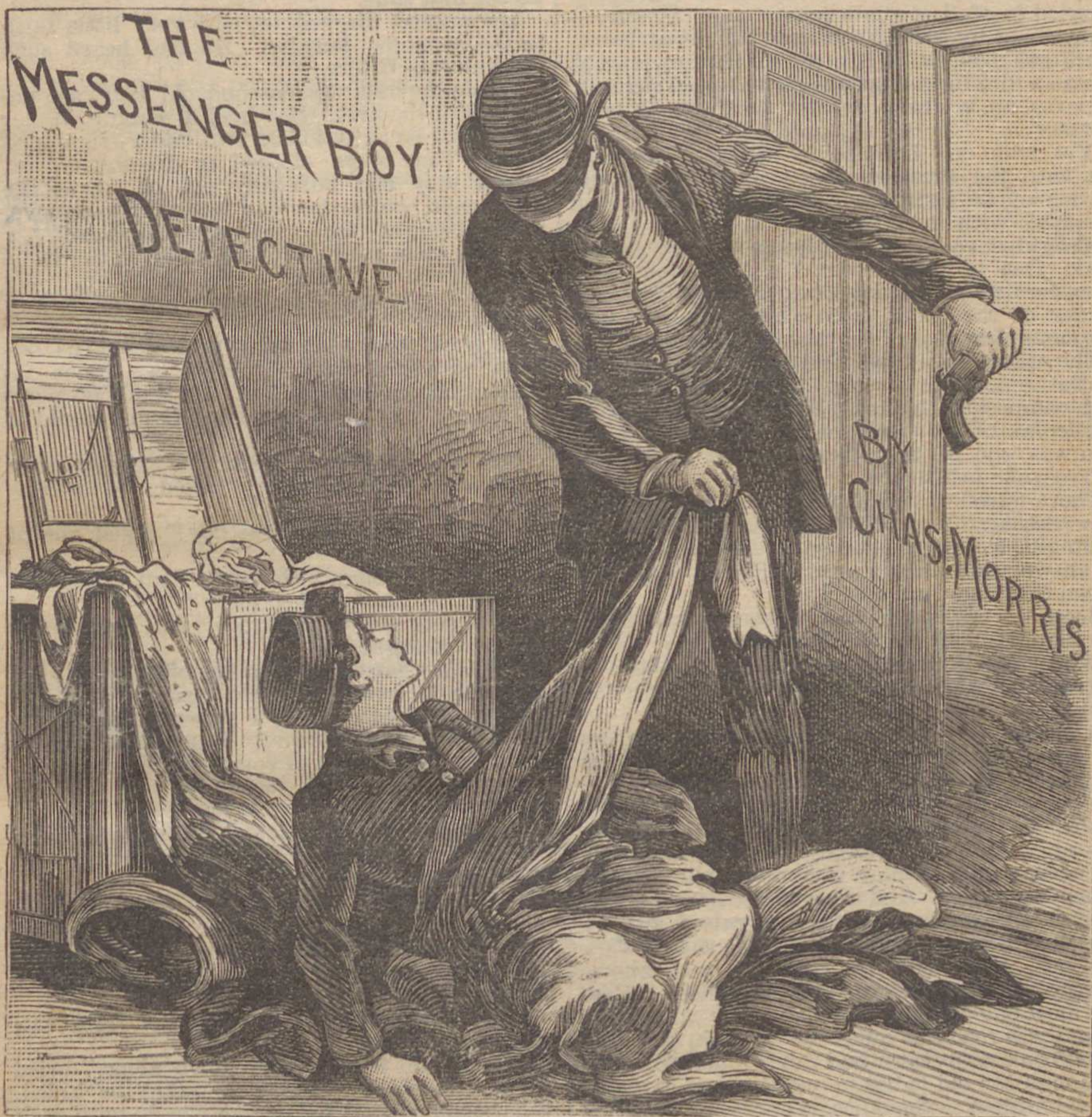
BEADLE'S POCKET Library

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Vol. XVII. \$2.50
a Year.

Published Weekly by Beadle and Adams,
No. 98 WILLIAM ST., NEW YORK.

Price,
Five Cents. No. 209.



OVER HIM STOOD THE DREADED FORM OF THE BURGLAR, HIS EYES SEEMING TO BURN LIKE COALS OF FIRE.

The Messenger-Boy Detective;

OR,

THE TABLES TURNED.

BY CHARLES MORRIS,
AUTHOR OF "SAM CHARCOAL," "TOM TANNER,"
"DASHING DAVE," "DARK PAUL," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT SAM FOUND IN THE CELLAR.

It was a late hour of the night in the good "City of Brotherly Love." Out of doors the faint glow of the gas lamps gave a very feeble imitation of daylight. From a considerable distance came the clear gleam of an electric light, in bright earnest of the "Light of the future." All was silent in the streets, save when the hurried footfall of a late passer came by stirred up perhaps by fear of a certain lecture at home. Darkness had fallen on all the houses, except where a dim light betokened a midnight student, or, mayhap, a weary watcher by the bedside of sickness.

Yet from one building a bright gleam shot out into the shadowy streets. It stood at the corner of two streets, and its open windows gleamed with bright gaslights. Within this well-lighted room several persons were assembled. One of these seemed a telegraph operator, for he sat in front of an instrument in a corner of the room, from which came the monotonous tick, tick of the Morse instrument.

The others were boys, dressed in the uniform of the American District Telegraph Company, and composing the night force on duty at that particular office. For the apartment in question was one of the offices of that useful and wide-awake institution.

There were but two of these young gentlemen now present. Two others had gone off duty at midnight, leaving this brace of messenger boys to answer any calls which might be made between that hour and morning.

Soon was heard the clear tinkle of a bell from the signal-board in the corner of the room. The operator turned his attention at once to the instrument, while the boys sprung up, eager for duty.

A groan that was half an oath came from the operator. It was followed by a sarcastic laugh.

"Hang me if it isn't the Bounce old maids again!" he ejaculated. "A mouse in the pantry this time, I'll bet a shilling. I believe those two old women give us more work than all our customers together. And a cat in the garret is the most dangerous burglar they've raised yet. I hope they'll be accommodated some time. You peg out, Sam—609 De Lancey, you know. Hardly worth while to trouble an officer, unless you meet one on your way."

Sam was ready as quick as a flash, and was off before the operator had fairly done speaking. Although the old ladies in question had given so much business to the office it happened that this was the first time he had been sent to answer

their summons. He reached the house without having met any guardian of the night.

"Mighty high-toned," remarked Sam, looking with an observant eye at the brown-stone front of the mansion before him. "Big-bugs, I s'pose, with a gold-mine in the cellar."

He mounted the steps, and was debating whether he would apply his hand to the bell-pull when the door, which had been open a crack, was thrown wide open, and the face of a greatly scared old lady appeared.

"Who are you, boy?" she asked, in a loud whisper. "Are you from the telegraph office?"

"That's where I hail from," answered Sam, with little courtesy.

"Why did they send a boy?" she asked sourly.

"Go back and bring a man. I want an officer. There's a burglar—I am sure it's a burglar—hid in the cellar!"

"Mercy!" replied Sam. "But s'pose there is? I guess I'm good for any one burglar. Wouldn't be the first time."

He pushed his way in, with very little faith in the supposed burglar. He had heard such false alarms before.

Inside the hall was a second old lady, a counterpart of the first. She held a candle in her hand, and its light fell on two badly frightened faces. They were clothed in dressing-gowns, which they had hurriedly put on, while the night-caps, which they had forgotten to remove, gave a comical look to their anxious faces.

"You must get help," they cried, in the same loud whisper. "You might be killed. We wouldn't have anything happen to you for any money."

"I guess you don't know much 'bout us fellows," drawled Sam. "Why, we lunch on burglars down at our office. I'd think no more of tacklin' one of them chaps than I would of eatin' a peach."

The old ladies' eyes began to express some admiration of Sam, as they looked into his fearless face.

"What is your name, my boy?" asked one of them.

"Slippery Sam, Shadow Sam, Slocum's Sam, Saucy Sam, and so forth!"

"Oh, dear me, what names!" she held up her hands in amazement.

"That's what the boys at the office think; I'm anything to suit," rejoined Sam. "But my dad's name is Slocum, so I s'pose by rights I'm Samuel Slocum, Esquire. But Slippery Sam or Shadow Sam kind of comes out slicker."

The two old ladies looked at one another. They were at a loss what to make of this boy.

"But all that's not bizness," continued Sam. "What's the row? Whereabouts is that burglarious individual?"

"In the cellar," answered the first old lady in a stage whisper, her voice full of horror. "We heard him fumbling about. And he fell over something and made a great noise. We've been 'most frightened to death."

"I'll soon settle him," remarked Sam valiantly.

"I'm afraid to let you go down alone," cried the second old lady. "You might be killed. What could a little fellow like you do with such a desperate character?"

"Maybe you don't know what us little fellers is made of," answered Sam. "All spring steel, and with quicksilver in our veins. They don't take any other kind on at our office. Give me the candle and I'll soon shadow this chap."

He snatched the candle from the old lady's trembling hand, and started toward the cellar door.

"Oh, come back!" they cried, in concert. "We would die of fright to be left here in the dark! You must not leave us!"

"But how am I goin' to root out that burglar, then?" demanded Sam, contemptuously. "I never learned how to be in two places at once. S'pose you come with me?"

"What? Down that cellar? Never!" came in a chorus of terror.

"I dunno what's to be done, then. I might be split in two, but I don't b'lieve it'd turn out a success. The splitting might be easy done, but the splicing together ag'in is the difficult p'int."

Sam shook his head very doubtfully. He could not see his way out of the quandary.

"Light the gas," suggested one of the old ladies. "Sister and I wouldn't be so afraid if we had a light."

Sam doubled his fist and gave himself a sharp punch in the head.

"That's what you deserve, Sam Slocum, for being so stupid," he ejaculated. "You might have thought of the gas yourself if you'd had any brains."

The old ladies looked doubtfully at the queer boy, as he proceeded to light the gas. They hardly knew what to make of him. In a minute more Sam had several burners lit and the room was as light as day.

"Here," he said, sarcastically. "Guess I can stir up that critter now. I s'pect it's nothin' anyhow but a stray dog that's got into your cellar."

"It's a man, I tell you!" cried the first old lady, in an indignant whisper. "It's a burglar. Be very careful. They always have pistols and knives about them."

Sam laughed incredulously. He walked boldly back toward the door which led into the cellar. The sadly-frightened old ladies, clasping each other tightly, slowly followed, as if afraid to lose sight of their young defender. They pointed out to him the entrance to the cellar.

All this conversation had been going on in a loud whisper. They were afraid to speak above their breaths lest they might bring upon them the terrible monster who had taken possession of the underground region of the house. Their eyes followed the little figure of the daring boy with mingled admiration and alarm. The young Shadow made his way very quietly down the cellar stairs. The candle threw its light for some distance ahead, and his sharp eyes watched every point before him. But he had not the least belief in the notion of the old ladies or he would have been very clear of taking the risk. Sam was no fool, if he was bold and daring.

A variety of utensils occupied the cellar floor. Piled against the floor on one side was a heap of cut wood, on part of which was flung a dark-colored cloth. The boy noticed all these points,

but he saw nothing suspicious. He had got well forward in the cellar without a sight of anything alarming, and was about convinced that there was nothing even as large as a cat to excuse the alarm when he made a slight stumble, and the candle dropped from his hands and was extinguished upon the hard floor.

Sam threw his hand forward to support himself and it fell upon the heap of wood, or rather upon something soft under the cloth that lay on the wood.

"What is that?" came in frightened chorus from the old ladies at the head of the stairs.

A loud laugh was the answer of the youthful pioneer.

"It's just as I expected," he said jeeringly. "It's a stray dog that's got into your cellar and is curled up on the wood-pile for a snooze. I got my hand on the hairy rascal's ears. Guess I might as well slide back to the office."

"No, no! He may be mad! He must not be left there!"

"Calculate 'tain't no part of my bizness to stir up mad-dogs," answered Sam, sarcastically.

"We don't take on that line at our office. Shut the cellar door and he'll be good till morning. Then you can treat him to a dose of blunderbuss if you've a notion."

As he spoke, he groped his way back to the cellar stairs. He soon gained the hall above, and closed the door behind him. The old ladies looked gratefully on their brave young champion.

"Ain't there no bolt to this door?" asked Sam.

"No. You are not afraid he will get out?"

"I've got somethin' to tell you," began the young Shadow, mysteriously. "Don't you make no noise, or things'll git squally. *That dog story is all a blind! There's a man hid in the wood-pile!*"

"Mercy on us!"

"Hush! Not a word, for your lives! I've greased the fool's ears. But if he hears a whisper from you he'll know that his fat's all in the fire!"

CHAPTER II.

A DANGEROUS WEAPON.

MISS MARIA and Miss Sophia Bounce were the names of the two middle-aged maiden ladies who dwelt at 609 De Lancey Place, with no other protection than that afforded by a deaf old colored servant. As they were wealthy, and had considerable silver and other valuables in the house, it would have been safer for them to have some man as protector of the establishment. But they were such confirmed old maids, that they could not endure the sight of a man about them, and preferred to shiver at every cat-call, and tremble at every mouse-scratch, rather than introduce one of these dangerous creatures into the house.

"Who knows but he might turn out to be a burglar himself?" queried Miss Maria.

"Or maybe cut our throats in the middle of the night for our trifle of silver?" suggested Miss Sophia.

It was too great a danger to run. So they surrounded themselves with burglar alarms, made telegraph connection with the District Telegraph

Station, and dwelt alone with their deaf old servant in mortal dread.

Scarce a night passed without some source of alarm. Not a week went over their devoted heads but they were scared out of their seven wits. The noise of a drunken man in the street, the scratch of a mouse, a puff of wind in the chimney, even the kick of a mule in a stable three squares away, were magnified by their anxious fancies to efforts of burglars to break into the house, and they had more than once sounded the burglar alarm on wakening out of a dream of house-breaking.

Their one source of constant complaint was the stupidity of their deaf servant, who slept stolidly on through all their alarms, and who might have been carried off bodily in her bed without troubling her brain about such a trifle.

"If we's born to be killed by burglars, how's we gwine to help it?" she persisted. "Dar's no use gittin' skeered 'bout it, missus. Luf 'em grab all de silber, ef dey wants it, so's dey don't 'sturb us."

"That's just like you, Dinah," complained Miss Maria. "You are very willing for other people's silver to be stolen. You would not like it much if they were to take your pots and pans."

"Da'r welcome to 'em," rejoined Dinah. "So's dey lebs de ole woman 'lone, dat's all I keers fur."

It may be imagined that the district officers grew rather tired of answering the Bounce alarms. They had been so often fooled, that the joke was becoming played out. It was for this reason that Shadow Sam had gone so boldly into the cellar. He had not a remote idea of finding anything alarming.

When they came within the circle of gas-light again, there was a look of triumph in the old ladies' faces under all their fright.

"Didn't we tell you so?" they cried in concert. "The people at your office think we are frightened about nothing. But we are not so nervous as that. The burglars always made their escape before."

"Well, you've got your man this time, anyhow," answered Sam curtly. "There's nothin' like keepin' it up. Ye're bound to come in at the winning-post in time. Sure as shootin' there's a man in the woodpile."

At this positive announcement their triumph disappeared and their fright returned. They clutched each other convulsively, and looked with wide-open eyes at Sam.

"What's to be done?" came in a terrified whisper. "It's just too dreadful to think of. He may murder us all."

"He won't me," answered Sam, "if I only git a fair show to run."

"Oh, no, no! You must not leave us! We dare not stay here alone."

"I don't b'lieve I could handle a burglar," remarked Sam doubtfully, looking down at his diminutive frame. "Jist you stay here while I go out and stir up some help. We'll gobble up that fellar 'fore he knows it."

"No, no!" they caught the young Shadow's arm with a convulsive clutch. "He may murder us before you come back."

"Not much," answered the boy, valiantly,

"Didn't I fling wool in his eyes? You go out for help then, and leave *me* till you come back."

"Oh, mercy! To go out into the street alone at this time of night? Two lone women? We couldn't think of such a thing. What would folks say?"

"Anyhow, something's got to be done," rejoined the young detective. "If you're afeard to go yourselves and afeard to let me go, I don't see what's to hinder Mr. Burglar havin' his own way. Got any shootin'-irons 'bout the 'stablishment?"

"Any what?" asked Miss Maria, in amazement.

"Any shootin' riggin'? Such as pistols, or blunderbusses or rifled cannon, or the like? If I'm to stay here, I'm goin' to rig up a masked battery."

"Yes," cried Miss Maria, joyfully. "We've got a pistol, a revolver. Our nephew left it here, and he loads it every time he comes."

"How often does he come?" asked the boy, doubtfully.

"Every year. He lives at quite a distance from here."

"I'm afeard that load's got stale," remarked Sam. "Don't think I'd like to meddle with that there deadly weapon."

"But he was here only a month ago."

"Oh! That's more to the p'int. S'pose we evacuate that revolver."

This conversation had taken place in low tones, so as to avoid any danger of its being heard in the cellar. Before following the old ladies, Sam proceeded to the front door, and opened and closed it noisily.

"That's to put the gentleman in the cellar off his guard," he announced. "He'll think I've made tracks."

"Mercy, boy! That might bring him right up-stairs."

"Never thought of that," rejoined the little burglar-hunter. "But he won't stir till everything's quiet. Let's see them small-arms."

They led the way to the stairs, walking very softly. Sam cautiously followed. Reaching the second floor his conductors entered a room in the rear of the house. From the various articles neatly placed on shelves, and trunks and boxes on the floor, it seemed a sort of store-room.

Against the side wall stood a large chest, of which Miss Sophia lifted the lid. It was packed full of goods.

Sam looked on curiously at these proceedings. He did not know what to make of them. He had lit the gas at their request, and now stood wondering what they were after.

The old ladies were trembling as if in an ague. They seemed as fearful of the contents of the chest as of the cellar.

"Why don't you git me the pistol?" asked Sam, after the floor was half covered with the dry goods removed from the chest. "I don't keer to see the bottom of that box, if it's that you're arter."

"It's in here," whispered Miss Maria confidently.

"In there?"

"We was afraid to keep it about," acknowl-

edged Miss Maria. "It's so very dangerous. Why, it might have gone off and shot us both!"

"You ain't sayin' it's down there, under all them dry goods?"

"Yes. It's loaded, you know. We thought we'd put it in a safe place."

Shadow Sam whistled a long note of amazement.

"Why didn't you git your nephew to carry it off and fling it in the Susquehanny? It wouldn't hurt nobody there."

"But we wanted it in the house. Suppose some burglars had come on us in the night?"

"Well, s'pose they had? Would you have dug out this weapon and shot 'em?"

"I wouldn't have touched it for the world!" cried Miss Maria, holding up her hands in horror.

"Then I dunno what you want it fur. That's all. Sich things don't go off spontaneous. Next time you'd best put it in a bucket of water and cover it up so's the flies can't git at it. Then you can be sure it won't hurt nobody."

Miss Sophia suddenly stopped her explorations, and fell back with a little scream.

"Mercy on me! I almost touched the thing!" she exclaimed.

With a laugh of contempt Sam looked into the chest. It was empty of its contents, except a roll of muslin, which was pushed closely to one corner.

"Is it in this?" demanded the boy.

"Yes. Oh, be more careful. It might go off."

"Tell you what," he grimly answered. "S'pose you peg up to the garret and lock yourselves in there 'fore I touch it. I don't b'lieve it can shoot you through two floors and a pair of ceilings."

The young Shadow was diligently unrolling the muslin as he spoke. He began to think there were twenty yards of it wrapped around the dangerous weapon. It spread on the floor all about him, and no signs of the pistol were yet visible.

The two old ladies stood pressed tightly against the wall, their hands extended and their eyes protruding in dread.

"Here it is," exclaimed Sam at length, as a small nickel-plated revolver fell into his hand, accompanied by a slight scream from the old ladies. "It's lucky no burglar come round here while it was in that there box. I'm 'feard it might have been very dangerous."

He clicked the lock, at which sound the old ladies crouched down to the floor, and pulled their night-caps over their eyes. They seemed to fear that the next moment would be their last.

"Don't you git skeered. I ain't goin' to hurt you," he remarked, as he examined the charges.

"It's lucky I know something 'bout revolvers. Joe Jenkins and me didn't go frog-shootin' down the Neck fer nothin'."

"Oh!" exclaimed Miss Sophia. "Hush! Didn't you hear that? I'm sure somebody's creeping up-stairs!"

"Let him creep," answered Sam valiantly. He had heard nothing but the wind in the trees.

"Say, s'pose you two lock yourselves in some room. I'm kind of 'feard you won't be much

use round here. Jist leave me to settle that burglar's hash."

"Are you not afraid of him?" asked Miss Maria, with a look of sincere admiration.

"Me afeard of him? Hope you don't think I'm that sort of a chap. Why, they won't take on a boy at our office till he's captured his brace of burglars. Jist leave me alone here. I'll settle him. I'm 'feard this deadly weepson might hurt you if you keep 'round."

At this suggestion, the slight remnant of courage evaporated from the hearts of the old ladies. They hastened to a room on the opposite side of the hall, and Sam heard, with much satisfaction, the click of a lock, as they fastened themselves in.

"Got rid of them, anyhow," he soliloquized. "But if they think I'm goin' to stay here and be meat for their burglar, they don't know Shadow Sam, that's all. I'm bound to slide out of this 'stablishment quicker than greased lightning'. The idee of a boy like me facing a burglar! I wonder what they take me for? I'll soon stir up somebody that's got more muscle, if he hasn't got more grit."

Grasping the pistol, Sam walked cautiously to the head of the stairs. He was about to make his way as carefully down them, when a sound below arrested his attention. He listened for a minute or two. It was a low, creaking sound.

"Sure as shootin', I'm dished!" he exclaimed to himself. "Mr. Burglar is broke loose! It's too late now to hunt help. I've got to put this job through myself, or bu'st a-trying!"

CHAPTER III.

THE GAME OF HIDE AND SEEK.

THE sound which Shadow Sam had heard was a low, creaking noise, such as floors or stairs are bound to give out when a person is trying to get over them very quietly in his stocking feet. He listened intently. The sounds appeared to come from the floor of the hall below. They indicated a very stealthy movement. He even fancied he could hear a suppressed breathing.

It must be admitted that Sam's heart beat rather loudly. He had never been in such a scrape as this before, and he would have given something to be out of the present one. The boy did not have much fear in his composition, but he was too young not to be startled by the job he had in hand.

He continued to listen. The sounds seemed to approach the foot of the stairs. Then they ceased, and a dead silence prevailed. The young Shadow waited for full five minutes, but all continued as still as death below. There only came that faint breathing sound, which perhaps was all in his excited fancy.

It was not a very pleasant situation. The boy was well satisfied that it was a man's head which he had felt under the cloth in the cellar. It had moved under his touch, but had settled down again at his blind about the dog. That man now—perhaps a desperate and well-armed burglar—stood but ten feet below him. Sam had undertaken to guard the house against this dangerous invader, and he began to fear that he had taken on a job too big for his boots.

Slyly slipping off his shoes, he backed gingerly away. He wasn't quite prepared to meet his antagonist face to face. The odds were much too great.

"Wouldn't I give a pint o' peanuts to be out of this 'stablishment?" he asked himself. "The chap as says I wouldn't don't know much 'bout human natur'. Or, 'bout boy natur', anyway. I ain't easy skeered, but there's too much pork fur a shilling in this job. That's my notion."

He continued his stealthy retreat until he had gained the store-room. The contents of the chest still covered the floor in a considerable heap. Closing the door until but a crack remained open, the boy placed himself in a listening attitude. The minutes passed very slowly. Not a sound came from below. Had the burglar heard him and taken the alarm? It began to look that way.

Nearly a half-hour passed in this vigilant watch. All continued quiet. But now a faint sound came to Sam's keen ears from across the hall. It was the old ladies, who were growing too nervous to remain alone in their locked room.

"Thought they was settled," growled Sam. "If I'm goin' to capture this here burglar they've got to keep shady, that's all."

But if the truth was known a scream from the Misses Bounce wouldn't have made him very angry. Capturing burglars is a very nice thing to talk about, but it is not so clever to put in practice. The boy was too proud of his trust to give the alarm himself, but he had no objection to somebody else doing it.

"Wish I was in a ice-cream saloon jist now," he said to himself. "Strawberry cream is better than burglar on toast; that's my idee—Hush, Shadow! Them stairs are beginnin' to crackle. It's a-comin', sure pop."

In fact the sounds below had recommenced. The burglar, after gaining the hall, had waited for something over a half-hour, perhaps to see if the boy would return with help. Finding that all continued quiet, he had resumed his operations. He was slowly ascending the stairs.

The movement was a very stealthy one. He seemed to be letting his weight come gradually upon each step. But there are some boards that have so much natural music in them that they creak under the lightest touch of a foot.

It was such slight sounds which had arrested the little Shadow's attention. All he heard was two or three faint creaks, but his active imagination eked out the rest. He was as sure that a man was ascending the stairs as if he had seen him in the full blaze of gas-light.

Ten minutes passed by. Sam's eyes were at the opening in the doorway. A gas-jet turned low burned midway of the hall, throwing a faint light from end to end. There was also a low light in the store-room. It had not been turned quite out.

A quick throb came to the boy's heart as an arm suddenly made its appearance, thrust out from the head of the stairs into the light of the hall. In a moment more the full body displayed itself.

It was very faintly revealed, but the boy was sharp-sighted, and his senses were sharpened by the excitement of the occasion. He saw a

human figure, of medium hight and rather slender in frame. Instead of the rough attire he had expected, the clothes, so far as he could make out, were well cut and well-fitting. And instead of the ferocious, desperate visage, it was a handsome face that met his astonished eyes, with well-cut features and clear complexion.

He had but a glimpse at it, it is true, for the man had hardly gained the hall ere he covered his face with a close mask. He evidently did not care to be recognized, in case he should be seen. But unfortunately for his object he was a second too late. His features were photographed on Shadow Sam's memory.

The hall gained, this gentlemanly looking burglar repeated his former tactics. He stood motionless for full ten minutes, supporting himself against the wall, while the eyes that shone through the two holes in his mask moved quickly from point to point, with the utmost vigilance.

Sam was getting seriously worked up. He was used to coming up quickly to the point, and this excessive caution increased his nervousness until he was boiling with suppressed excitement. He would have much preferred that the fellow should make a dash at once, than come on him in this creeping, ghostlike fashion.

"I'll yell out, if this keeps up; shoot me if I don't," he said to himself. "I'm not goin' to stand this all day, you bet. If that coon stands there another minute I'll wing him with a bullet."

Sam meant it, too. He took the revolver from his pocket, and was on the point of drawing back the hammer, when the mysterious intruder, unaware of his danger, straightened himself up, and began to move stealthily along the hall.

The young Shadow dropped his pistol hand, and closely observed him. Step by step he came forward, with a full minute between every two footfalls. The carpeted floor was firmer than the stairs. Not a sound came from under the burglar's feet.

"Comin' square this way, or I don't know nothin' 'bout beans," Sam soliloquized. "Guess I'd best retreat. Got the whip band of that gentleman now, but I've got to shoot or back down, one or t'other."

It is no easy matter to shoot a man in cold blood. It was impossible to Sam. He drew back from the door, looking around him for a convenient hiding-place. His eyes fell upon the heap of dry goods upon the floor, which had been taken from the chest. In an instant the boy's mind was made up. He replaced the pistol in his pocket, and noiselessly buried himself under this convenient refuge.

Nor was he much too soon. But two or three minutes more elapsed when the burglar slowly pushed open the door, and entered the room after first giving it a careful survey.

Shadow Sam had made a small hole through his covering, by whose aid he managed to see this stealthy entrance. The concealed boy trembled with excitement. Things were growing hot around there.

"I hope to goodness gracious he'll soon make tracks," said Sam to himself. "It's chok-

in' hot here, and I'm 'most run out of breath. Anyhow, he won't find me, that's sure. Nobody'd never think of lookin' for a live boy under a pile of rags. I'm just as snug as a bug in a rug."

But the live boy had forgot one little particular. Although he was safely concealed, he had left his shoes standing out openly on the floor, and these suspicious indications had instantly attracted the attention of the intruder.

Sam listened with the utmost intentness. He could not use his eyes now, but he made the best use of his ears. Yet no sound came to him. All was deathly silent. He had no means of telling whether the man was still in the room, or had retreated.

In such a situation the minutes are desperately long. Not two minutes had passed, yet to the boy Shadow it seemed an hour.

"The chap's not here now, that's sure," he thought. "He ain't no rag-picker, and there's nothin' else here for him. I'll give him two minutes more, and then I'll peg out 'fore I'm quite choked."

There fell upon his excited senses a sound, which he imagined came from the hall. Sure now that the intruder had retreated, he was debating whether or not to throw off his covering, when he felt a breath of cool air on his neck, and caught a gleam of light in his open eyes.

He turned his head upward, and then suddenly jerked himself into an astonished heap. For the cover which concealed him had somehow disappeared, and over him stood the dreaded form of the burglar, his eyes seeming to Sam like coals of fire as they glared down through the openings in the mask.

The Shadow was fairly captured. A cry of alarm might have broken from his lips, but there came a hissing whisper from the burglar.

"Not a whimper, or I'll crack your skull. You've caught the mad-dog in earnest, you little villain! You thought to fool me by slamming the door, but I'm not to be caught with such chaff. Up with you now, before I blow out your brains."

Shadow Sam slowly arose to his feet, considerably chopfallen. He fancied that he had been sharp as a steel-trap, yet this fellow had seen right through him. The boy was utterly sold, and he stood before his captor completely downcast.

"You're a smart little coon, but you haven't got your eye teeth cut," remarked the sarcastic robber. "When a fox creeps into his hole he doesn't leave his claws outside, and a sharp boy would take his shoes in with him."

The boy had nothing to say. He stood convicted. You could have knocked him down with a feather.

"Let me see," continued the robber, in the same low, sarcastic tone. "What's to be done with this chap? Truss him up, I fancy, with a gag in his mouth. There's plenty of material here."

He hunted out a piece of stuff from the pile. Shadow Sam showed signs of resistance, but his capturer silenced him by displaying the butt of a pistol.

"Just make a whimper, and I'll quiet you for

the next six hours," he sternly declared. "Turn round here."

The boy quietly obeyed. He saw that resistance would be useless. In a moment more a hard bunch of rags was forced into his mouth, and the villain was tying a firm bandage around his head, so as to thoroughly secure the gag. It effectually silenced Sam's powers of speech.

"Now hold out your hands."

The boy did so, but before his capturer could proceed to bind them there was a sudden and unlooked for diversion. Into the opened door gazed an intensely scared face. From a pair of wide-open lips came a shrill scream.

"Help! help! thieves! murder! fire!" came in quick succession from the frightened tongue of Miss Maria Bounce, for it was she.

With an oath the villain released the captive boy, and made a quick spring for the screaming woman. But she hastily darted back into the room from which she had emerged, while the sharp click of the lock told that she had secured herself from pursuit.

A second oath came from the burglar's lips, as he violently shook the door.

"Stop that noise, or I'll murder the pair of you," he fiercely cried.

"Not much, I've a notion," came an unexpected answer.

There was a hand upon his collar, a threatening click, and the pressure of a ring of cold iron upon his temple. He gazed hastily around, to encounter the sight of a revolver, and behind it the young but resolute face of Shadow Sam!

"S'pose you come with me, if it ain't ag'in' your principles," remarked the young amateur detective.

He had taken his opportunity, torn the gag from his mouth, whipped out his pistol, and fairly turned the tables on his antagonist. The capturer was captured.

"Take down that thing!" yelled the fellow in fright. "It might go off!"

"It certainly will, if you don't walk the chalk mighty slick, I tell you that. You're booked for the nearest station-house, and you might as well come quietly. For I'm bound to deliver you safe, this side up with care. Peg out now, while your skin's whole."

It didn't need any interpreter to tell what Sam meant. His actions were significant enough. But there was a look of cunning on the prisoner's face as he obeyed the boy's impulse, and walked before him to the stairs.

Down-stairs they went together, and along the hall to the front door.

"Open the door!" commanded the young Shadow.

The man did so, and made as if he would step out. But, at the same moment, he quickly stooped below the aim of the pistol, and gave a sharp, back-banded stroke with his left arm, taking Sam in the middle.

The boy dropped as if he had been shot, the pistol in his hand exploding as he fell. The released robber sprang through the door, and was off like a flash down the street.

CHAPTER IV.

THE YOUNG SHADOW MAKES A DISCOVERY.
SHADOW SAM picked himself slowly up, rub-

bed himself reflectively, cast his eyes up to the ceiling, then stepped to the door and took a doubtful look at the sky.

"Yes, them's the stars there, sure enough. But I could ha' swore I saw the whole set of them in the ceiling here not a minute ago. It's queer how things git transmogrified."

He gazed at the pistol in his hand.

"Dunno! but I'm well rid of a bad bargain," he continued. "Had more than my hands full with that chap. But I hope he carries that there bullet in his hide to remember me by."

As for pursuing the fugitive, that was quite out of the question, even if the boy had any thoughts in that direction. He was out of sight before the young Shadow got to the door. But in a minute more a couple of men came running up to the house. And at the head of the stairs the voices of the badly-scared old ladies was heard. Sam's shot had stirred up a hornets' nest.

"What is the matter?" cried the men curiously. "We heard a pistol-shot."

"Practicing on night-hawks," answered Sam.

The Misses Bounce came hurriedly downstairs, with little screams of agitation and alarm.

"Oh, what has happened? Did he shoot you? Are you killed? Oh, say you are not, our brave defender!"

"I think I ain't," returned Sam, shaking himself quizzically. "Kinder sure I ain't. But he guv me a swipe that filled that there ceilin' chock full of stars."

"What was that pistol-shot we heard?" asked the men.

"It was a burglar," answered Shadow Sam.

"I nabbed the gentleman. But he knocked me down, and the pistol went off. You didn't see no chap, with nothin' on but his stockin's, runnin' down the street?"

"No," laughed one of the men. "We saw nobody quite so short of clothes as that."

"Nothin' on his feet, I mean," corrected Sam.

"Of course he had on a general assortment of dry goods."

A conference followed, in which the old ladies took an active part. It was wonderful how brave they had become, now that they were sure the house-breaker was gone. They would have done the most valiant thing if they had seen him.

They were not afraid of any man, not they. Particularly when they had a loaded pistol in the house.

"Maybe that ain't all of them," suggested Sam. "He might have a partner, hid in the wood-pile."

"Oh, mercy on us, you don't really think so?"

"I do believe there is. I heard an odd noise just now. Oh, dear me, I am 'most frightened out of my life!"

The courage of the old ladies had suddenly evaporated. Sam's suggestion, as they declared, was too horrid for anything. Something must be done. They would not dare go to sleep in that house again. They could hear all sorts of murderous noises. Miss Sophia knew that somebody was creeping up the cellar stairs at that minute. Miss Maria heard an

odd clinking. She was sure that their best silver was being stolen.

Nothing would answer but that the boy Shadow and the two men should go through the house and thoroughly examine it. They knew they would be murdered in their beds, if the burglars were not hunted out.

The gentlemen good-naturedly consented. They carrying candles, Sam behind them as a guard of honor, with the pistol, and the old ladies closing up the procession, with broomsticks trembling in their hands, the house was investigated from cellar to garret, every closet examined, and almost every pill-box opened, without a living creature the size of a mouse being discovered.

"You can sleep in peace," laughed the gentlemen, as they took their departure. "There's no danger of your having your throat cut for this night, at any rate."

"Sam would have left too, but there was another ceremony to be performed ere they could part with him. The pistol must be put back in its place of safety."

"Why don't you do that yourselves, like you did before?" asked Sam.

"We do it? We touch that deadly weapon? Not for the world!"

"How did it get there, then?"

"Why Philip—our dear nephew—put it there. We made him do it after he had loaded it."

Shadow Sam laughed to himself as he thought that Mr. Philip Bounce must be as queer a customer as his old maid aunts. What good could he expect his loaded pistol to do? But the boy duly obeyed orders, and carefully restored the pistol to its place of safety, covering it up again with the contents of the chest.

"There, it's safe now. No danger of its hurtin' anybody. Burglars might rampage 'round here like clowns in a circus, and they wouldn't be none the wuss off fur that there revolver."

The old ladies looked curiously at the odd boy. They hardly knew what to make of him. He kept such a grave face that they could not tell whether or not he was laughing at them.

"You saw the burglar," whispered Miss Maria, as if that terrible person was at her elbow and she was afraid he would overhear her. "What did he look like?"

"Oh, a horrid man, I know!" exclaimed Miss Sophia, "with a great black beard and a savage face. A big, rough, ill-looking fellow!"

"Not much," answered the young Shadow. "He wasn't that sort at all. Why, the chap wasn't much bigger than me, and dressed as neat as a dandy. He was good-lookin', too, with a pretty little mustache and a nice side-whisker. I'd never have grabbed him, you bet, if he'd been one of them rough, rippin' fellers like that."

The two old ladies looked at each other with a new scare in their faces. There was something in their expressions which Sam could not understand—a fright of a very different kind from that which the burglar had given them.

Miss Maria turned to him with a sour look upon her face.

"I don't believe a word of it!" she shrewishly declared.

"It's not true," chimed in Miss Sophia. "You have been put up to this by some of his enemies."

"Some of this dandy burglar's enemies?" repeated Sam, in amazement at this attack. "Anyhow, I didn't know *you* was his friends. Guess I'd best be makin' tracks. There's too much hot water 'bout here."

And the youthful champion took his departure without further remark, leaving the ladies of the house very strangely affected by his description of the burglar.

With the reader's consent we will go forward a week in our story. Nothing of any importance had happened in the mean time, except that the Misses Bounce, who were not ungenerous, had called at the office and left a substantial present for Samuel Slocum, Esq., in acknowledgment of his bravery.

Shadow Sam's story had been met with doubt by his companions.

"You can't put that down our throats, Sammy!" cried Joe Jenkins. "You can change a club into a diamond, but you can't make us swallow such taffy as that you're telling us."

"Him nab a burglar!" laughed Bill Barly, another of the boys. "A high old gudgeon of a burglar that must have been. Jist look here, Sam, and see if there's anything green' bout my optics."

And he pulled down the corners of his eyes significantly.

But the present, which came while Sam was out on an errand, and was accompanied with an account of the whole affair, quite changed the aspect of the case.

It appeared that the Shadow had not bragged, and had not even told the whole story, and he at once became the hero of the office. The boys who had not believed him before, could not hear enough of it now. And they were particularly interested in the comical masked battery of the old ladies.

"Lawsee!" laughed Joe, "that's the funniest thing out 'bout that pistol. If I was them I'd drop it down the well at once, and settle it for good."

"Sam," came a sharp call from Mr. Brown.

"Ay! ay!" answered Sam, springing briskly up.

"Boy called for at 758 Arch. Hurry round there and see what's wanted."

Shadow Sam lost no time in obeying. He had a reputation for promptness, and was bound not to lose it. In fifteen minutes from the call he presented himself at the place in question. It was a private house, with a conveyancer's office attached.

The gentleman present, a sharp-featured business man, turned briskly to the boy, as he entered, cap in hand.

"You are the messenger-boy I sent for?"

"Yes, sir."

"Take this packet, then. It must be delivered without delay to Jonas Furnan, 75 Quince street. Do you know where that is?"

"Yes, sir."

"Be off then. You had best take the street cars. I wish him to have it as soon as possible."

Sam took the packet and was off with his usual briskness.

He drove along at a rapid pace, quietly pocketing the car fare which had been given him.

"If I can keep up with the cars there's nobody worse off, and I'm six cents richer," he said to himself as he drove along, bound that the cars should not beat him. "Catch me greasin' them rich car companies. I've got better investments than that for my money."

The street to which he had been directed was a retired down-town street, respectable but not showy. No. 75 was a quiet house. But just as Sam reached it the sound of laughter came from its partly raised parlor windows. The curtains were down, so that he could not see what was going on inside.

Ringin' the bell, Sam was quickly admitted. He inquired for Mr. Jonas Furman, and the servant spoke to some one within the parlor.

"Yes, let him come in here," called a gentleman's voice.

The boy was ushered into a small, neatly-furnished room. Around its center-table sat three well-dressed young men. They were smoking, while an open bottle in the center of the table indicated that they had been drinking also.

"A packet for Mr. Jonas Furman," announced Sam, briefly.

"For me? Let me have it, then. Who sends it?" It was a tall, handsome fellow who spoke.

"Mr. Paul Thompson, conveyancer, 753 Arch," announced Sam.

"Ah, yes. That's all right. Anything to pay?"

"Not as I know on. I wasn't told to collect anything."

"Then I won't waste any money on you," answered Mr. Furman, with a frank laugh.

"That will do."

"Ain't there no answer?" asked Sam.

"Wait. I will see."

The boy Shadow stood waiting, cap in hand, while Mr. Furman deliberately opened the packet. He noticed that there was a fourth seat at the table, unoccupied. As he continued to wait a step sounded without, the door of an adjoining room opened, and a gentleman entered, who took the vacant seat. He spoke a word or two to his companions, and then his eyes fell on Sam, who had been intently watching him.

Sam's eyes dropped on seeing that he was observed, but not too soon to notice a slight start, an involuntary movement made by the young man.

"There is no answer," announced Mr. Furman.

"All right, sir. Good-day."

In a jiffy Sam was on the street. He struck his hand on his knee, while an odd look came upon his face.

"No answer, ain't there?" he ejaculated. "Maybe there ain't; but if I haven't twigged that there dandy burglar, then there's no snakes in Virginny! Didn't git much of a look t'other night, but I've got him down fine. He knowed me, too! It's lucky he don't know I shadowed his handsome features, afore he got his mask on."

Sam walked along, his mind full of the strange consequences which might arise from this unexpected discovery.

CHAPTER V.

THE WAY THEY DO THINGS ON 'CHANGE.

MISS MARIA and Miss Sophia Bounce were seated in their trim parlor, conversing in their prim way on the perils of life, and the blessings of Providence. More than a week had passed since the epoch of the great scare, and their fancies had invented only one burglar in the mean time. And as that one proved to be a stray dish which had been pushed from the table by their favorite cat, and had fallen with an alarming crash to the floor, they began to think that luck had changed in their favor, or that Providence had taken them under its special protection.

"It's such a blessing that we had a pistol in the house," remarked Miss Maria. "What would ever have become of us without it?"

"Or without our dear nephew, who looks so carefully after our safety."

"Or that brave boy who captured the burglar. Just to think of such a mere child as that taking hold of that great monster!"

"But you forget," answered Miss Sophia. "The boy was not such a child. And he said the burglar was a small, well-dressed man, just like—"

"Oh! don't say that again!" interrupted her sister. "I'll never believe it! Never!"

"I don't see how the boy could tell," continued Miss Sophia. "He says himself the man had a mask on."

"He lied, sister! I do believe he lied! Though it is dreadful to have to say that of anybody!"

"Oh, Maria! Could he ever be so wicked as that? A mere boy, too?"

"I really believe it," answered Maria, very firmly, "though it hurts me to say so."

The old ladies looked deeply grieved at the thought of any one being so wicked. Ere they could quite recover from the shock the door opened, and there was ushered into the room no less a person than Samuel Slocum himself.

The old ladies blushed deeply. They had been almost caught in making disparaging remarks about this individual.

But Slippery Sam was happily unconscious of all that. His fresh young face was shining with good-humor, and his neat uniform looked as if it had just received a severe brushing.

There was a pleasant smile on his face. He removed his cap and bowed very politely. Sam had been well brought up.

"I just come round to tell you," he began, "that I'm ever so much obliged."

"Obliged for what?"

"All I done was jist duty," he continued. "I didn't expect no present. But that ain't to say but I'm glad enough to git it. And I thank you ever so much."

"Oh, that! But we thought you deserved something. For you acted very bravely."

"I dunno," answered Sam, doubtfully. "I was kind of cornered. Any rat will fight when he's cornered. I'm desp'ratt' afeard I'd left that burglar alone if I'd had a fair show to run. I'm Slippery Sam, you know. But when a fellar can't slip he's got to face the music."

"You are a brave little fellow," answered

Miss Maria, decidedly. "And you must not come around here and tell us you are not."

"We will not permit any one to say so. Not even yourself," Miss Sophia firmly added.

"Well, I won't fight 'bout it," answered Sam, with a queer smile. "Only I wouldn't never found it out myself. I'm ever so much obliged, anyhow. And—I guess I'll go."

He put on his hat and sidled to the door.

"Wait a minute," said Miss Maria.

She spoke in a low tone to her sister.

"Have you time to go to Tenth and Chestnut for us?" she asked.

"Guess so. I ain't on duty now."

"Take this note, then, to Mr. Morgan's silk store. They will give you a package of goods, which bring back here."

"Ay, ay!" answered Sam, in his cheery way. This sounded like business. He was off in a flash.

Miss Sophia turned to Miss Maria.

"Do you think he really lied, sister?"

"It looks dreadful like it. Very dreadful like it," was the firm reply.

But it seemed that they were not to have any long private conversation to-day. The door-bell again rung. Old Dinah answered, and ushered into the parlor a personage at sight of whom a brace of little shrieks came from the old ladies.

"Philip! Philip Bounce!"

"Our dear nephew! Is it really and truly possible?"

"I think it is," came the laughing answer.

"I am quite sure I am myself this morning."

The impulsive little maiden ladies jumped up, and clasped their smiling visitor in a twain embrace, kissing him so hastily that one hit the end of his nose and the other his chin.

"To think of seeing you here now! Why, it is eight months from your time."

"Oh! I've broke with the country," answered Philip. "It's not wide enough to hold me. I am going to take up my residence in the city."

He was a young man, of middle hight and size, and quite handsome in face. He wore no whiskers, but a long, well-curved mustache adorned his upper lip. Yet there was a somewhat jaded look on the well-cut features, as if the young man had been taking life at too fast a gait. And there was something sinister under all his smiling aspect, which a judge of physiognomy would have at once detected. But his maiden aunts were oblivious to all this.

"Going to live in the city?" exclaimed Miss Maria, a little dubiously.

"Why, what will you ever do here? You know nothing of city life."

The old ladies were noted for being "a little near," and they preferred yearly visits from their handsome nephew.

"The fact is, we've broke up," said Philip, carelessly seating himself. "Mother and sister's gone West to Indiana. Going to settle down there with grandfather. But that's too humdrum for me. Thought I'd strike out for the city."

"But what will you ever do here?" asked Miss Maria, doubtfully. "You have no business. You know nothing of city life. You have no money."

"And we can't help you," hastily added Miss

Sophia. "We are ever so hampered. What little we have is all locked up."

Philip threw his hat on the table as he gave an encouraging laugh.

"Why, bless you both, my dear aunties, I wouldn't take your money for the world. And maybe I know something more about city life than you fancy. I haven't been asleep for the last twenty-five years." The bold fellow actually winked. Miss Maria was sure it was a wink, though she could hardly believe it of her innocent nephew.

"And as for having no business," he continued, with a light laugh, "I'd like you to show me anybody of my size that's quite so full of business. Why, I am up to my ears in it."

"You?" they chimed in concert, looking at him with deeper surprise than ever.

"Yes, little me," he rejoined.

"What kind of business, pray?"

"I'm on 'change," answered Philip, with a careless shrug.

"On 'change?" They did not quite understand.

"Yes. In the Gold Exchange. A broker, you know. Turning paper into money faster than other people turn money into paper. Talk about business, my dear little ignorant aunties. Why, it is the boss business."

"The—what?" They held up their hands in horror at this low expression.

"Oh, excuse me!" he faltered. "I picked up that word on 'change. They've such queer ways of talking there. A fellow drops into it before he knows what he's about."

"I hope our nephew, Philip Bounce, won't fall into any vulgar talk," answered Miss Maria severely. "After his careful bringing up, too."

"All right, aunty. I'll take care in future. I keep telling those vulgar brokers that. But it is waste of words with them. They're dyed in the wool."

"Dyed in the wool?"

"That's another of their queer sayings. I wouldn't stay in such vulgar company, only it's so profitable."

"Are you really making money, Philip?" asked Miss Sophia, with growing respect for her nephew.

"Well, I should think so, indeed!" he replied, swelling himself proudly. "Haven't laid by a fortune yet, of course. I'm too young at the trade. But I can see my way clear. There's millions in it."

"What is this business like?" asked Miss Maria curiously.

"It's the surest thing in the world," he replied easily. "And ever so simple. Gold is jumping up and down all the time, you know. To-day it's twenty per cent. premium. To-morrow down it tumbles to eighteen, or up it skips to twenty-five, and nobody knows why. Now there's plenty of people dealing in it all the time. That's what we do on 'change. We buy and sell for these folks. They may make, or they may lose, but it's a dead sure thing for us. We always make."

"But is it all chance, Philip?" asked Miss Sophia, with great interest. "Is there no way of telling whether it is going up or down?"

"Of course there is," laughed Philip. "For them that's in the ring, you know. There's something happens abroad. Old Bismarck slaps France in the face. Queen Vic—Victoria I mean—pats Turkey on the back. Straight off there's going to be a war somewhere, about something. Nobody ever knows what it all means, but up skips gold, or down skips gold, and the chaps that smell out the row first sweep in the stakes."

"Well, I'll declare!" exclaimed Miss Maria, quite losing sight of her nephew's slang phrases in her interest in the subject. "I never knew before how it was done. And you are in the ring?"

Philip broke into a hearty laugh.

"In the ring! To think of my aunt Maria using broker's slang! I caught you that time. Why, you dear old loves, if I chose to put anybody on the track for a good thing, I could do it easy. But, that's not our way. Outsiders have got to take their own chances. Suppose something new should happen. Suppose next dispatch should say that Queen Vic didn't pat Turkey's back, but pulled his nose. Away would fly gold on the other tack. Then if our speculator lost, he would swear it was all my fault, and never think of blaming Queen Vic. No, no; I'm not going to get myself in such scrapes. Everybody must go in with his eyes open."

"But it would not be your fault," declared Miss Sophia, very earnestly. "It would not be right to blame you."

"But folks would, you know. Why there's a rich opening at this minute. Gold's bound to slip up to-morrow. I could put any outsider in the way of making a nice haul. But I won't."

Philip shut his lips very decidedly.

"Is it sure to go up?" asked the old ladies in concert. They were very much interested.

"We think so," he carelessly answered. "Of course there's no counting on what gold will do. But we think so."

"And you won't let outsiders in?"

"Never." He spoke firmly.

"Not even your aunts if they should wish to try their fortune?" asked Miss Maria.

"You?" Philip straightened himself up on his chair. "You go into gold speculation? Mercy on us! Why, I never dreamed of such a thing. And didn't you just tell me your money was all locked up?"

"Yes, yes! exactly!" hastily answered Miss Sophia. "We could spare a little, of course. A little, Philip."

"Don't you do it," he continued. "There's nothing sure about gold. It might take an awkward turn. I wouldn't have you lose for anything. It would be a queer business, I think, for me to come to the city and salt my rich aunts on the gold board." He laughed heartily at the idea.

"But you think there is a good chance?"

"If it was anybody but you I would say it was a first-class chance. But when it comes to you I can't help being cautious."

The old ladies conferred in a low tone, while Philip sat trying to make out the pattern of the wall-paper.

"We will try it, Philip," Miss Maria at length declared. "We want to help our nephew in his new business." She gave a little nervous

laugh. "I will give you a check for a small amount. We can't spare much. I hope you may be very lucky with it."

"Why, if you insist on it," he answered. "But I declare I would rather not. Suppose you see some other broker and ask his opinion."

She had to force the check into his reluctant hand.

"Well, if I must, I suppose I must. But I will drown myself if anything goes wrong."

They had been so interested as not to hear the ringing of the door bell, nor the entrance of a new visitor. The first thing that recalled them to themselves was a long, low whistle of surprise. They all looked up to see before them Shadow Sam, who was gazing intently into Philip's face. The latter gave such a start that the check nearly dropped from his hands.

"By Jiminy, if this ain't a queer mess, then salt ain't sour!" ejaculated the young Shadow.

"What do you mean?" cried the old ladies.

"You don't mean as you dunno who this nice fellow is? Sure's you're alive, it's the burglar! No use squirming," he continued, to Philip. "I twigged you that night. I say it ag'in: *you're the burglar!*"

CHAPTER VI.

THE SPIDER AND THE FLY.

SHADOW SAM formed the center of a group of highly-interested boys at the office of the District Telegraph Company. He was just then the hero of his young companions, for he had been telling them the story of his discovery and exposure of the burglar.

"You jist never seen anything like it," continued Sam. "Why, that there chap turned all the colors of the rainbow, and the old ladies yelled as if they'd sot down on pins. It was ten times wuss nor an earthquake."

"Did they believe you?" asked Joe Jenkins, curiously.

"That's what I'm comin' to," answered the boy Shadow. "You can't rush this story, Joe. I've got the innings in this little game. You see, it turned out that they was his aunts, and he was their nevvie. Well, he lied out of it, square and straight. And they b'lieved him. Sam Slocum was a liar, and an ungrateful vagabond, and everything except a thief. That's what come of tryin' to be honest."

"You didn't stand that, Sammy?"

"I run from it," answered the boy detective. "That nice young man talked of kickin' me out of doors, and the old ladies went fur their broomsticks; so I begin to think my company wasn't welcome. I left 'bout that time."

The lads all broke into a laugh at their young comrade's dry manner.

"You aren't goin' to stand it, Sammy?" asked Bill Barly.

"Well, I hope I ain't," was the energetic reply. "I ain't no liar, and never was. You boys know that. S'pose I'm goin' to be put down as a liar by that smart coon? If I do, you can blow me up with a fire-cracker, that's all."

This was, in fact, Shadow Sam's great source of complaint for the treatment he had received.

He had always prided himself on telling the open truth in every case, and to set him down as a liar was the worst insult he could have received. He might be "only a boy," but he was not going to rest easy under any such charge.

"I'll show them who's the liar before I'm through with the job," he declared. "I'm goin' to smell out that there Philip Bounce or bu'st somethin'. I know one of his hidin'-places, and a boy with his eyes open may see some p'int. Them old ladies is down on me the wust way, but I'll learn them a thing or two yet."

Sam meant it all. He put himself on shadow duty at 75 Quince street. Whenever he was off from the office, and able to change his uniform for a less conspicuous dress, he found it very convenient to play in the above-named street. He felt sure that if he watched sharply enough he would get an eye on Philip Bounce or some of his associates, and might trace them to their various haunts. He proposed to unearth the mode of life of this moral young man.

But it looked as if his efforts were going to prove of no avail. A week passed by, but neither Philip Bounce, Jonas Furman, nor any of the others made their appearance at 75 Quince street.

Leaving the boy Shadow at his unprofitable guard duty, which he snatched from the intervals of his office-work, we must take our readers to another part of the city, and to other scenes of interest to our characters.

It is in the room of a house in the central section of the city that, on the day after the scene described in our last chapter, we find Philip Bounce, in company with a personage considerably older than himself. The latter is a stern, hard-featured individual with a sinister look in his eyes, and altogether with the expression of a man who would not stop at any wickedness to gain his ends.

There had been some hard words going on between the two, and there was a lowering anger about Philip's brow as he stood sullenly before his associates.

"You put me up to it," he said bitterly. "You got me into an ugly scrape, and you put me up to that plan of getting out of it."

"Did I?" asked the other coolly. "Perhaps so. But you were a very apt pupil, my dear Philip. You must admit that."

"I don't care a fig. We haven't seen the worst of it yet. That boy saw my face. Why, he charged me with the whole business before my aunts! I had to lie till everything was blue, to get out of it."

"Well, did *that* hurt your feelings? I fancy that comes natural to you, also."

"No matter. It's a sharp little rogue. He swore he'd find me out yet, and I fear he will. At any rate you're as deep in it as I am. I am not going to put myself to much trouble to screen you, Mr. Jerry Plummer."

A dark frown came upon the face of the other. He moved uneasily in his chair. After a moment he broke into a sarcastic laugh.

"You kick very sharply in the traces, my young colt. Let me advise you not to forget the other matter. There is a note with the indorsement of Silas Herring & Co., which was

sold by one Philip Bounce to one Jeremiah Plummer, for a consideration. That interesting paper comes due in three days. It is now in the Commercial Bank waiting to be paid. Unless it is met in due time by Philip Bounce it will be protested, and offered to Silas Herring & Co. for payment. Then I fear there will be an explosion. I imagine that firm will deny the signature, and there may be some awkward talk about forgery."

"Exactly," answered Philip coolly. "And as long as I can't take it up, maybe Jerry Plummer had better do so."

"Oh, I am not interested."

"Perhaps you are. Let us see. To raise money to pay that note I undertook to rob my aunts, under Mr. Plummer's instruction. Very well; the burglary proved a failure. I am in danger of getting into trouble about forgery. If I do I may as well be killed for a sheep as a lamb. Misery loves company, they say. If I am convicted of the forgery, I think I shall acknowledge the burglary, too. Then Mr. Jeremiah Plummer comes into the game. He put me up to the burglary. He showed me how to get into the house, and helped me to do it. I fancy that was a company concern."

"Ah!" answered Mr. Plummer coolly. "Very neat that. It does you credit. But where is your proof? It is easy to say all this, of course. But how will you prove it?"

"Why, you put me up to the whole thing. It was your scheme all through."

"Very true. I am willing to admit anything here. But I am afraid I may lie out of it in court. I did not appear personally in the matter, you know. Of course, you can say in court that I put you up to it. But I fancy no judge will send me to prison for that. I can point triumphantly to my highly respectable character."

There was a sarcastic smile on his face, as he thus spoke.

"So! I begin to see through your little game now," said Philip, bitterly. "I am to be victimized then, to serve your ends?"

"Oh, no. Just pay that note, and all will be well."

"Suppose I cannot?"

"Then it will be rather sad for you, my young friend. It has always been the case, you know, ever since the world started. Spiders build webs, and flies walk into them. Let us say that, in this business, I am the spider and you are the fly. Very well. The spider always provides for his own safety. It is only the fly that gets his blood sucked."

The cold villain looked like Mephistopheles as he gazed at the victim of his schemes. But Philip's expression was rather puzzling to him.

"I am glad you have put it on that footing," was the answer. "We understand each other. I always thought you were a soulless rogue, and now I am sure of it. But you forget that there have been cases of the fly breaking out of the spider's web. And other cases where the spider has found his retreat cut off."

"I don't build my webs that way," answered Jerry, sarcastically.

"We shall see," answered Philip, quietly, as he put his hand into his breast.

"Oh, if that's the game!" and Jerry drew his hand from the open drawer of the table before him. The hand held a pistol.

"Pooh!" replied Philip, contemptuously. "So you fancied that I was going to draw a pistol on you? Only fools and vulgar rogues indulge in such arguments as that. We gentlemen of the trade don't deal in bullets. I have something here of more importance than all the bullets in your revolver."

He withdrew his hand. It held nothing but a printed strip of paper, about six inches long, two in width.

"What is that?" exclaimed Jerry, springing hastily up, with a look of alarm.

"Only a promissory note, drawn by one Philip Bounce, in favor of Jeremiah Plummer, Esq. and indorsed by Herring & Co. Said note has been paid and taken up this day by the drawer, at the Commercial National Bank."

"The devil!" hissed the discomfited rogue. He had been completely outgeneraled by his younger associate. "You paid it? Where did you get the money?"

"I don't fancy that is any business of yours. I have ways of my own of raising money. I hardly think I will let you into the secret."

"What does all this mean, then?" asked Jerry sullenly. "Why did you not say at first that you had paid the note?"

"Only that I wanted to get you to show your hand," laughed Philip. "I was hardly green enough not to suspect your game, my dear sir. I see through it now. You are the spider and I am the fly. Very good; but your web was not quite strong enough. You are willing to be five hundred dollars out, eh? It was a very neat game to hold this forged note over me, and so make me your tool? But it didn't work."

"By Heaven! it shall work!" cried Jerry, fiercely, as he seized the pistol. "Hand me over that paper, or I will send a bullet through you!"

"Softly, softly! Two can play at that game." Philip's hand held a pistol, too, which clicked ominously as he drew back the hammer. "I have other uses for this note."

He tore off his signature with his teeth and commenced to chew it, while he covered his antagonist with the pistol.

"Here it is. Make the most of it." He flung the torn remnants of the note on the table. "And the next time you try on a game like this, Jerry Plummer, be sure you don't play it on a man by the name of Philip Bounce. The Bounces have all had their eye-teeth cut."

Various expressions had passed over the older villain's face during these remarks. He seemed at a loss what cue to take. When Philip ceased speaking Jerry threw his pistol on the table and burst into a loud laugh.

"Hang me if the boy isn't learning fast!" he cried. "He does justice to my teaching. I am proud of you, Philip." He held out his hand, which Philip declined taking.

"There is another little matter which we will settle first," the young man continued. "You have always plotted so as to keep yourself clear of the law. But you have put your foot in it for once, sharp as you are. You fancy that if I am brought in for that burglary your skirts

are clear. You forget that you put your name to a bit of paper in connection with it."

"That paper was destroyed!"

"Hardly. I am too good a penman for that. You taught me the art of forgery, you remember, and so I gave you a forged copy of that paper to show you how apt a scholar I am."

"You hold the original yet?"

"I do."

Jerry Plummer gritted his teeth. He had been foiled on all sides.

"See here, Philip," he suddenly cried; "there is nothing to connect you with the attempt at burglary except the evidence of that boy?"

"Nothing else."

"Suppose I silence that boy?"

"Do so, and the original is yours."

"It is a bargain. Slippery Sam, as he calls himself, shall never give evidence against you!"

There was a dark look on the villain's face as he uttered these words.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BOY SHADOW HAS A DOUBLE SURPRISE.

"If there's anything tiresomer than kickin' a feller's heels 'bout the office, I'd like to know what it is!" exclaimed Shadow Sam. "I've talked myself dry, and there's nobody else got nothin' wuth listenin' to. I wish somebody'd send a job in."

There came a call from the office at this moment.

"That's my cue!" cried Sam, as he sprung hastily forward. "I'm next on the roll, Mr. Brown, and I'm b'ilin' over fer a job."

"We'll try and accommodate you," smiled Mr. Brown. "There is a box of five hundred circulars to be distributed, and you can take it on, if you are so eager."

"That's lovely!" returned Sam. "What's the sort, Mr. Brown? High-toned, or common trash? Got envelopes on 'em, hey? Ain't weddin' invites, nor nothin' of that style?"

"No. But you are to be very careful in distributing them. Only go to good-sized houses, in respectable streets. Put them all under doors, or else ring the bells and hand them in. The parties are very anxious that the work shall be done right."

"All correct," answered Sam. "Guess I'll ring the door bells. It takes more time, but there's more fun in it."

"More fun?" queried Mr. Brown.

"You bet there is. Why if you'd see the way some of the girls behave, you'd think it as good as a circus. First they think it's the letter carrier, and they're goin' to git a love-letter from their beaus. Then they smile just as sweet as new milk. But when they find it's only a circular—lawsee! the milk turns sour right off. You oughter see how their noses go up—But I mollifies them 'fore I leave," continued Sam.

"Mollify them?"

"Yes. Soft soap them, I mean. Tip 'em a touch of the blarney. It's astonishing, Mr. Brown, how quick they come round."

"Oh, get out!" laughed the operator. "You're learning too fast, Sammy. Off with you, and

don't waste too much time soft-soaping the servant girls."

Shadow Sam clasped the box under his arm, and struck away down the street, whistling as merrily as a bird just out of its cage. He liked nothing better than to be at work. He was so full of life and spirits that he could not remain long about the office without getting into mischief of some sort. Mr. Brown knew this, but knew also that the Shadow was the most efficient errand boy on the force, so he took good care not to leave him too much idle time.

Grass did not grow under Sam's feet as he hurried along on his errand, slipping the circulars under doors where it was easy to do so, but ringing the bell and handing them in where he could not get them under. And he did not omit a little of the soft-soaping which he had promised to use. He was a good-looking young fellow, with a lively tongue, and there are girls who are susceptible to these charms.

Sam had an idea in his head as he moved onward. He was growing tired of hanging about the door of 75 Quince street on a fruitless task. But here was an opportunity to see the inside of the door. He had a good excuse for calling at the house and asking for Mr. Furman.

By the time he had reached this far downtown locality his box of circulars was nearly empty. He had a few left, however, and he boldly rung the door-bell of the house in question, and waited somewhat anxiously for the answer to his ring.

It came at length in the shape of a frowsy-looking woman, who had certainly forgotten to comb her hair that morning. She looked sourly at the messenger-boy, and snapped out:

"What do you want?"

"Excuse me fer interruptin' you," answered Sam, with immense politeness. "I've got a little note here for Mr. Furman, which I want particular—"

"No such person here," she sharply interrupted.

"There ain't?" cried the Shadow, in great surprise.

"No, there ain't."

"Why, I seen him here myself only a week ago, persisted Sam.

"Don't care. He's not here now."

"Where is he then? This is very important."

"Don't know where he is, and don't care. He cheated me out of a week's room rent, that's all I know. He's an owdacious rascal, and you can find him the best way you please."

She slammed the door violently to, and stamped angrily back into the house, leaving the young Shadow quite dumfounded.

There was no use trying the soft-soap policy on this good lady, that was very evident. The boy walked slowly away, deeply cogitating.

"I dunno what she wanted to bite my head off for," he said to himself. "It wasn't me cheated her out of her rent. But I can't say as I blame Mr. Jonas Furman. That woman's got too spicy a tongue; altogether too spicy."

Sam soon emptied his box, and started back for the office. He had been completely dished. He must take another tack if he wished to get on the trail of Philip Bounce, and what that tack was to be was not very plain.

Yet he was destined to have another adventure ere he reached the office. He failed to notice two men, who stood in the doorway of a hall on the street through which he was passing, and the younger of whom pointed him out to the elder.

Shadow Sam strolled on, quite unaware that he was being shadowed. But, ere he had got far he was accosted by a strange voice. The boy quickly turned, and saw before him a tallish and rather slender person, seedily dressed, his face heavily whiskered, and his slouch hat drawn down over his eyes so as to half conceal his features.

"Are you not Samuel Slocum—of the telegraph messenger boys—known as Shadow Sam?" this person very suavely asked.

"That's me, Samuel Slocum, Esquire," was the prompt answer.

"Excuse me, but I wish to be sure that you are the right person. Was it not you who so bravely defended the house of the Bounce ladies against a burglar a week or two ago?"

Sam looked at the speaker with some astonishment. How did a stranger come to know all this?

"I dunno as there was any thing very brave 'bout it," he replied. "I couldn't run, 'cause I was cornered, so I had to show fight. I nabbed the feller, but he floored me and made tracks. That's the whole of it."

"Not quite. The ladies tell me that you saw his face, and would know him again, and that you are on the lookout for him now."

"Why, if he'd tumble over me, I'd help to pick him up," laughed Sam. "I'm bound to git that chap in limbo, 'fore I'm done with him. But it's queer they told you that. They didn't talk that way to me."

"They have changed their mind," answered the speaker, with a smile. "They think you ought to be rewarded for your courage, and have asked me to give you a little present, which they have made up for you."

"Lawseel!" cried Sam. "Why, they've giv me a present a'ready for that."

"They have?" in a surprised tone.

"You bet! I don't see no use of their layin' it on so heavy."

"Perhaps they think that they have injured you by their late suspicions, and wish to repay you for this injury."

"I dunno," answered the boy detective, indifferently. "There's no use bringin' things down to sich mighty fine p'int. But, I don't see no reason fur me to go back on presents. 'Tain't so often they come in."

"That's right, my boy. I have it here for you."

The speaker produced from under his coat a package very neatly done up in white paper, and distinctly marked with Sam's name. It seemed a box of some five inches long, and two or three wide. Sam looked at the directions.

"Samuel Slocum, 10 Plum street." That's me. But I dunno how you twigged me so easy. I never seen you before."

"I have seen you, then," smiled the man. "I often pass your office. I was on my way there now when I happened to see you on the street. Good-day! Be very careful not to drop that

box. There is something in it will break easily. And don't open it at the office, unless you want to have to divide with the boys. Wait till you get home."

"I hope it isn't eggs," replied Sam with a grimace. "If it is, and they happen to be bad ones, I think I'd rather divide with the boys. I wouldn't be a bit stingy with them."

"It is not eggs," laughed the man, as he walked quickly away.

The young Shadow strolled on looking curiously at his prize which he had dropped into the empty envelope box. Despite all that the man had said he did not feel quite satisfied.

"There's somethin' mighty queer 'bout the whole business," he fancied. "'Cording to all accounts them old ladies has never been so blazin' generous afore. Everybody says they'll pinch a dollar till it's as thin as a wafer 'fore they'll let it slide.—And after they took their brooms to me, too."

Sam shook his head very dubiously. He could not get the thing straight in his cranium. There was something very odd about it, and about this stranger, of whose face he had seen little more than the nose.

He had not gone far before he had met Bill Barly, one of his office cronies. Sam was running over with the story of the box, and soon confided it to Bill. The latter was a very high-spirited little fellow, and he broke out in sudden anger.

"I wouldn't have it!" he declared. "You can do as you please; but if anybody took a broomstick to me they couldn't smooth me down with a box of candy, for that's what I expect it is."

"What would you do?" asked Sam.

"What would I do? Why, I'd face the music; that's what! I'd take it square back to them, and I'd tell them I was very much obliged, but I wasn't taking presents now."

"You would?"

"You bet I would!"

"Then, that's just what I'll do!" cried Sam, decidedly. "I don't want their candy, Bill. I can buy my own candy. Come along; I'll show you if I don't mean it."

The two boys changed their course toward De Lancey place, with intent to call on the Misses Bounce.

Sam had felt a strong disinclination to accept the box at first, and Bill's advice decided him. He would not keep it.

Meanwhile the man who had given Sam the box had slipped back and rejoined his associate in the doorway. He touched him on the arm.

"Come back here quickly."

The young man followed to the dark rear portion of the long hallway. Looking cautiously around to see that he was not observed, the disguised man laid his hand on his chin. In a moment the heavy beard came off in his hand, revealing a clean-shaved face. He pushed back his hat. It was the face of Jeremiah Plummer. The young man beside him was Philip Bounce.

"Well?" asked the latter.

"Not now. Let us get away from here first. We are not safe if anything should happen."

He pushed on through the hall into a rear street, and walked forward rapidly until he

was several squares distant, his companion closely following him.

At length Philip caught his arm and brought him to a sharp stop, in a secluded corner.

"I don't understand this," said the latter. "You promised to silence the boy. What have you given him?"

Jerry looked carefully around him. He then stooped, with a very dark expression of face, and whispered in Philip's ear the one word: *Dynamite!*"

"The deuce!" cried Philip.

"If the boy opens that box he will be silenced in a jiffy. There won't be enough of him left to make a decent funeral," whispered the heartless villain.

"I'll be shot if I stand this!" cried Philip. "Hang me if I can go murder! I will go after the boy and stop him opening it."

"And how will you explain your knowledge of its contents?" sneered Jerry. "Or suppose it should happen to go off while you are there? I am afraid it would be bad for Philip Bounce."

Philip hung back irresolutely. He had suffered his villainous associate to make him an accomplice in a dark and terrible crime.

"One boy more or less won't matter much," asserted the villain. "And when that box goes off it will very suddenly remove all evidence against us."

Philip stood biting his lip. He was in a very awkward quandary.

Meanwhile the two boys had reached their destination with the mysterious box. The old ladies received Sam frowningly. They had not yet forgiven his accusation of their dear nephew, who was going to make so much money for them on the gold exchange. The idea of such an active business man being a burglar!

"I'm very much obliged to you," began Shadow Sam, as he stood before them hat in hand, "but, if it's all one to you, I'd rather not keep it. I didn't do nothin' to be broomsticked for, and I don't calculate to be smoothed down this way."

Miss Maria looked at Miss Sophia with great surprise. Miss Sophia returned the look.

"What is the boy talking about?" asked the first.

"I am sure I don't know," answered the second.

"You don't?" cried the young Shadow. "Why, it's the present you sent me. The box, you know. Samuel Slocum, 10 Plum street," and Sam deposited the perilous box on the table.

"A present? We sent you no present!"

"It's queer if you didn't. I've got it here. Just giv' to me by the man you sent it with."

Sam commenced to untie the box.

"The box? The man we sent it with? What does the boy mean? We sent you nothing."

Sam by this time had removed the white paper cover, and revealed a small wooden box, with a sliding lid.

"You didn't send it?" he cried in surprise. "That's mighty queer. We'll soon see what's in it."

They all bent curiously forward, as Sam laid his hand on the lid to draw it back. It was a

critical moment. Little did they dream of the deadly contents of that innocent-looking box.

CHAPTER VIII.

GOLD DOWN AND TURNIPS UP.

ANY of my readers who knows what dynamite is, will understand the deadly peril encountered by the four unsuspecting persons who leaned over the box, whose sliding cover Shadow Sam was on the point of pulling back.

A moment more and they might have been torn into fragments, and the house wrecked as by an earthquake. But at this instant, Bill Barly, Sam's youthful associate, laid his hand on the arm of the latter.

"Stop!" he whispered. "Didn't you hear that?"

"Hear what?" demanded Sam sharply.

"That noise in the wall."

"I heard it," said Miss Sophia, always ready to be terrified. "Something between a scratch and a knock."

"Oh, nonsense! It's only a mouse," answered Sam, contemptuously.

"See here, Sam Slocum!" Bill angrily returned, "do I look like a feller that's goin' to be skeered by a mouse? It's a warning, I tell you! I've heerd that noise before, and there's always something happens."

"Let it warn then, if it wants to," retorted Sam, again taking hold of the box. "We ain't doin' nothin' to be warned about."

"Don't touch the box!" exclaimed Miss Sophia. "It's that! It must be that!"

"Who knows?" asked Miss Maria mysteriously. "I've read of people being blown up by such boxes. Maybe it's gunpowder, or nitro-glycerine, with matches fixed so as to set it off. There have been such things done before now."

Sam laughed merrily at this suggestion.

"Like to know who wants to blow me up!" he remarked, as he picked up the box and attempted to open it beyond their reach.

But Miss Sophia clutched it.

"It's us!" she exclaimed in a horrified whisper. "They know we have money. It's the burglar's doings, maybe. Put it down. Don't touch it for the world!"

"That's ridic'lous," averred Sam. "How's he goin' to know that I'd bring it here?"

"What kind of a looking chap was he?" asked Bill.

"Him? Why, he looked like an Italian brigand, or an organ-grinder without any monkey. Had a great black beard and a slouch hat down to his eyes. Didn't see much more of him than his nose."

"He was in disguise!" screamed Miss Maria. "It's some dreadful plot—I know it is! Oh, mercy! do not touch that box! We will all be killed—I know we will!"

"Put down the box!" cried Miss Sophia. "Suppose it should go off in your hands?"

"Why, if it's the way you think, I don't believe we'd know what hurt us," answered Sam.

But the affair did begin to look suspicious, even to the Shadow, and he laid the perilous box very softly on the table.

"What's to be done?" cried Miss Maria. "I'm half afraid to look at the thing! What made

you bring it here, boys? Take it away at once. It was ridiculous to bring it here."

"Perfectly nonsensical," echoed Miss Sophia. "Take it away at once!"

"Not much," rejoined Bill. "I wouldn't carry it for a million dollars."

"And look here at the directions," broke in Sam. "'Samuel Slocum—from Miss Maria and Miss Sophia Bounce.' Guess it's back home ag'in. I ain't goin' to carry the thing. Let's go, Bill."

"Stop!" screamed the old ladies. "Something must be done! We can't have that thing here! You must take it away!"

"We jest won't then?" answered Sam, sturdily. "Why can't you bury it, or something?"

"Us? We wouldn't touch it for the world!"

"Tell ye what," cried Sam, suddenly. "I've got an idee. Let's put it in the chest, 'long with the pistol. It'll be safe there. Won't never go off, nor hurt nobody, no more nor the pistol will."

A torrent of exclamations followed. That would never do! Suppose somebody was to break in the house, and they should want to get the pistol to defend themselves?

But Sam laughed down all objections.

"Any burglar could go through the house while you was rooting out that pistol," he declared. "Maybe, too, he might take this box to be full of gold-dust or bank-notes, and carry it off. Then that there burglar would have fun. It's a-goin' in that chest, or it's a-goin' nowhere."

After some further debate Sam conquered. He carefully wrapped up the box again in its original paper, though this time he turned the directed side inward, and left the blank side out. A comical thought came to the boy at this juncture.

"Got any pen and ink?" he asked.

"Yes. There are some on the side-table."

Sam provided himself, and commenced to write new directions on the envelope of the box, in large letters:

"Private papers of Miss M. & S. Bounce."

"How's that?" he asked, viewing his work with critical satisfaction. "Won't Mr. Burglar get sold if he takes that in? Maybe he'll carry it off to blackmail you."

"Put the thing out of sight," cried the ladies, nervously. "We can't bear to look at it. Something might happen."

The boys were not slow to obey. Anything in the shape of fun is always welcome to a boy. It was not long before the box was deposited in the chest, close by the pistol, and the contents of the chest packed in upon it. It was safely out of the way for the present.

The boys soon took their departure, leaving the old ladies all in a quiver with nervousness and excitement. They at once began to fear the most dire perils. Suppose something should shake the chest? Suppose the matches in the box should take fire spontaneously? Why did they ever consent to have it put there? Should they send for the police to remove it? But it might go off and blow up the house, if it was touched again. It was a dreadful dilemma they had thoughtlessly got themselves into. They

were likely to have plenty to occupy their minds while the box remained in the house.

We must pass rapidly by the events of the few succeeding days. They were days of anxiety and alarm to more than one of our characters. The Bounce ladies had more sources of trouble than one. That deadly box was still in the house. There was one subject of worry. And they had not heard from their nephew, Philip. How had their money prospered in his hands? Were they wise to trust him? Here was another fertile source of anxiety. To think of them, at their age, venturing to gamble in gold!

But Philip and his villainous confederate were no easier in their minds. Morning and evening they had examined the papers with expectant eyes. But they were doomed to disappointment. There was no story of a dreadful explosion, and the blowing to atoms of an innocent little messenger boy.

"I don't know what to make of it," said Jerry to himself, with a deep frown. "For some reason the boy has not yet opened the box. It could not fail if it was opened. I would give something to have it back again. One never knows what might come out."

"I am glad of it," was Philip's mental remark. "I can't quite bear the idea of killing the boy. Jerry must have made a blunder. The box couldn't have been got up right."

He was somewhat relieved in his mind when he called on his aunts, a few days after the above occurrence. In fact, he had been so much troubled about his own safety as that of Shadow Sam. Murder will out; and he was better satisfied that there was no murder to come out. The old ladies received him very cordially.

"We could not imagine what had become of you, Philip," they declared. "It is a full week now; just to think. And we have not seen nor heard of you. What is the news? How has gold gone?"

"Mercy on us, aunties!" exclaimed Philip petulantly. "You both talk at once, so I cannot tell what you are saying. You are both well, I hope." He threw his hat on the table, and quietly seated himself.

"Yes," cried Miss Sophia. "But about the gold, Philip? About the investment?"

"Why, you don't mean to say you haven't watched the papers! I thought you would have every point down fine."

"I didn't know that the papers gave it," acknowledged Miss Maria.

"Of course they do. You can follow the gold market there every day."

"But you are here now. You can tell us. How much have we made, Philip?"

"You know I advised you not to invest," Philip carelessly answered.

"Yes. But then you were sure it would go up."

"Not for you, you dear old gamblers. Only for outsiders," laughed Philip. "We can never calculate, you know. The fact is Bismarck didn't sign the treaty."

"And what has Bismarck's signing a treaty got to do with the price of gold?"

"Everything. Everything. Why, it even affects the price of turnips. Don't you know that? I thought everybody knew that. If he had signed it gold was sure to go up, and turnips to go down."

"And now?"

"Gold is down, and turnips are up."

"I do not care about turnips," exclaimed Miss Maria, petulantly. "You bought gold for us, then, before it fell?"

"Exactly."

"Well, then, do not sell till it rise again. Bismarck may sign that treaty yet."

Philip looked curiously at his aunt. He half fancied she was indulging in satire.

"Why, bless you, Aunt Maria!" he exclaimed. "Don't you know better than that? We do not do it that way. I bought on a margin."

"On a margin?"

"Just so. If gold had gone up you would have made money like sin. We don't do a two-penny business on our board."

"But gold went down."

"And the margin is swept out. Exactly. I am glad you see it now. I had a hundred of my own in the same boat. It all went. It's the fortune of war, you know. I am free to wash my hands of mine, but I hate consumedly that you've been so unlucky."

The two old ladies were looking at him with wide open eyes. They were just beginning to understand. All their money was lost.

"Oh, don't look so down in the mouth!" exclaimed their precious nephew. "It's always that way. Up and down. Up and down. To-day we're rich, to-morrow we're poor, next day comes a turn, and we're rich again. I am clean bursted now. I expect to be worth a million before the year is out. There's only one way. When you lose, go in heavier next time. Keep it up and it's bound to turn in your favor. One good pull and you wipe out all the bad ones."

"You would not advise us to go into gold gambling again?" asked Miss Sophia.

"Don't call it gambling, my dear aunt. That is too strong a word. Speculation, of course. I acknowledge it is speculation. Certainly, you will do as you please. I would not venture to advise you. Only it never does to be faint-hearted in this business."

"I'm glad we can do as we please," answered Miss Maria, sourly. "We have been a pair of old fools, Philip Bounce. We do not please to be again. We have paid dearly for our education in the gold business, and we do not care to indulge further."

"I am glad of that," said Philip, rising. "It is an uncertain business. I would never have advised you to go into it. You forced me, you remember. Well, good-day, aunties. I must be off. I am glad it was no worse."

"And to think," continued Miss Maria, "of my brother Philip's son going into a business that is nothing but gambling! I am surprised and astonished at you, Philip Bounce. I did not think you would ever disgrace the family in that way."

"Come, come, Aunt Maria," cried Philip, testily, "that is laying it on rather heavily. You have been in it yourself. If you'd won,

then gold dealing would have been entirely respectable. You lost, and now it's only gambling. Come, Aunt Ri. That won't work."

"I am heartily glad we lost," was the testy answer. "And I hope you will not come around here tempting us again."

"Well, good-day," exclaimed Philip. "I will not come, at any rate, until you are in a better humor."

He hastily left the house, none too well pleased with the result of his visit. He had fully calculated on being able to wheedle his aunts out of some more cash; but the decided stand they had taken settled that. The gold dodge was played out.

"I'll have to get up some other game," he cogitated, thrusting his hands deep into his pockets. "I have not a fifty left out of the last batch. Let me see. I think I will go down to Downy's and try my luck on the cards."

He was quite unaware that two persons were closely observing him at this moment. One of these was a young woman, poorly dressed, and with a pretty but careworn face. She held a child in her arms. The other was no less a person than Slippery Sam.

CHAPTER IX.

SHADOW SAM AND THE BABY.

THE place in which Philip Bounce soon found himself had very much the complexion of a gambling saloon. At one end of the room a thin-faced fellow, with a well-waxed mustache, was stolidly dealing faro, surrounded by a group of players, some haggard with anxiety, some joyful, others as stolid as the dealer. In another quarter a roulette wheel was dealing fortune or ruin to a second group of gamblers. Elsewhere were parties around tables, engaged in the ancient and honorable game of bluff. Here was a plentiful lunch, there a bar, with liquor free to all the thirsty. Free liquor is a very wise addition to a gambling saloon. The fools who risk their money on the turn of a card are doubly fools when they have whisky in their veins. They may fancy that they are getting their liquor free, but the hard-headed keeper of the gambling saloon knows better than that. He knows that he is very well paid for his whisky.

Philip had a run of luck just now. He had hit the winning card several times in succession, and his small pile of chips was rapidly growing. His face was flushed, and his hand slightly trembling. Any old gambler would have known at a glance that he had taken the fever and was bound to pursue luck until it deserted him.

Outside the saloon were two persons interested in what was taking place within—Slippery Sam and the young woman with the baby.

Shadow Sam was too sharp not to have noticed that this anxious-faced woman was on the track of Philip Bounce; though she had been too intent on her own object to perceive that she had an associate.

"There's somethin' queer afloat," fancied the young detective, looking sidewise at her. "I bet this feller's a scamp out and out. That there baby looks drefful suspicious. I'm jist a-goin' to speak to that young woman."

He sidled up to her, where she had rested her-

self against the corner of a house, with a very weary expression of face.

"Excuse me, miss," accosted Sam, politely. "But I've a notion as how you're most played out. And sort of interested in that there 'stablishment too, ain't ye?"

She turned to him with a slight start and a look of dread.

"Don't git skeered at me," continued the boy. "I'm only a boy, you see, and I don't mean no imperdence. Kind of interested in that 'stablishment myself. You're twigging that chap they call Philip Bounce now, I take it."

Her eyes opened wide with surprise.

"How can you know that?" she asked.

"Why bless you, ma'am," laughed the Shadow. "I'm in the same boat myself. He's my oyster as well as yours. Say, is he anything close to you? Sort of intimate like?"

"He's my husband," she replied.

Shadow Sam would not have been a boy if he had not whistled at this information. Yet he had half-expected it. When young women with babies in their arms pursue young men it usually means something.

"Whew!" he cried. "And he's run away from you? And that's his baby? And you're a-follerin' him up! My eyes, I never thought I was goin' to stir up so much fun."

"He deserted me," answered the young woman simply. "Left me to starve. But do you know anything of him? Do you know his haunts and his habits? Oh, tell me if you do!" Her voice was full of anxiety.

"That's what I'm tryin' to find out," rejoined the young Shadow. "I knowed he was aascal 'fore I met you. And I know it wuss than ever now. See here, Mrs. Bounce—that's your name, I s'pose?"

"Yes."

"Then let's you and me j'ine hands. The nice young man has got me into a sort of scrape. He lied on me, that's all. I said he was a burglar, and he said he wasn't. Don't calculate he'd say he was either; but I'm goin' to let him put the lie on me. Jist you say the word and we'll go for Phil Bounce together. And it's a caution if we don't bounce him bad, 'fore we're through with him."

"He deserted me," she answered wearily. "He shall be made to support me."

"It won't never do for you to foller him," declared Sam, decidedly. "He'll smell the rat right straight. Why, you don't know nothin' 'bout follerin. Leave that to me. I'll shadow him. I tell you what you do. Staying anywhere particular?"

"I have only been in town a few days," she replied. "And have been at a friend's house."

"Well, see here—Phil Bounce has got two rich old aunts, and he's makin' them b'lieve that salt is sugar; same time that he's tryin' to rob them. Now, s'pose you jist go to them aunts and tell them what kind of a hairpin he is. He's played sharp on you; jist you let out the whole job on him. While you're doin' that I'll foller him up. He won't twig me, you bet. I'm Shadow Sam. He's played both on us ugly tricks. No use in you follerin' him up. If he sees you he'll slide again. Jist you take my plan, and we'll nail him."

The young woman hesitated. She had wearily sunk down on the step beside her. The child was very heavy. Her face wore a very undecided look.

"Come! You can't go no further. That's flat," decided Sam. "Why, I bet that baby weighs a ton this minute. See here, I'm well acquainted with Miss Maria and Miss Sophia Bounce, and I'll give you a letter of interduction. Then you've got to do the rest yourself. Are you in on it?"

"Yes, anything, anything!" she wearily answered.

"All right," returned the boy. "I'll write that letter here."

He drew a rumpled piece of paper from one pocket, and a stumpy lead pencil from another, and making a table of the top of his hat he commenced to write very diligently. After a good deal of crossing out and filling in, Sam read his production with much satisfaction.

"That will do the work, I've a notion," he announced, as he carefully folded the letter. "Haven't any envelope, but I s'pose that ain't no account."

"Where am I to go?" she asked, as she took the note, and wearily rose to her feet again. "I hope it is not far for I am very tired."

"See here! I said that baby weighed a ton. 'Tain't far; and I guess Phil Bounce won't stir till I git back. Give me the baby. I'll carry the pretty little thing, and show you the place."

Mrs. Bounce hesitated. She was rather doubtful about trusting her treasure in Sam's keeping. But she was so tired and he so confident, that she finally consented. He proudly led the way, holding the baby as gingerly as though he were carrying a basket of eggs, and looking fearfully on every side, lest some of his boyish friends should see him.

"Carried many a thing in my time," admitted Sam. "But a baby's the awkwardest of all."

It seemed so, indeed, for in his efforts to get a comfortable hold he had got the child upside down, and it was slowly slipping through his despairing fingers. Naturally, too, the young cherub did not enjoy this mode of progression, and some very decided notes of music began to make their way into the air.

"Oh dear me! See what you're doing?" exclaimed Mrs. Bounce.

Sam hastily reversed his burden, and lifted it with such energry that this time it hung over his shoulder like a sack of wheat. The music continued to sound, and had got up to very high notes.

"Give me the child!" cried Mrs. Bounce. "You will drop it next."

"Me drop it!" exclaimed Sam. "I never dropped a baby in my life. Never carried one before," he added to himself. "Anyhow, here's the house. Glad of it, too. Dunno what makes the baby cry so. It didn't cry with you."

The young mother smiled as she relieved Sam of his burden. The child at once ceased crying. Sam looked at it askance.

"Was there ever anything so contrary?" he demanded. "Jist look at it now! And yelling like mad all the time I had it. There's somethin' queer 'bout babies, that's my notion."

"Or about boys," supplied the mother.

"Anyhow, here's where the rich aunts live. You give 'em my letter of introduction, and tell them the whole bizness. Guess I won't stay."

He gave the bell a vigorous pull and hastened away. Mrs. Bounce nervously sought to stop him, but he would not come back. He had got her into a very unpleasant situation, but it was too late now to recede. The door had been opened in answer to the bell. She must go through with it.

Meanwhile Sam was hurrying back to the vicinity of the gambling-saloon, rather glad to escape.

"If anybody catches me carrying a baby ag'in they can tell me of it, that's all," he declared. "I like music but I don't 'preciate that kind. Wouldn't have the boys at the office know of this for a pint of peanuts.—Hello! Guess I'm just in time!"

This exclamation was called forth by the sudden appearance of Philip Bounce, who had left the gambling-saloon and was walking moodily along on the opposite side of the street. He looked as if luck had turned against him.

Sam was not slow to take up the chase. He could do it safely, for there were plenty of people abroad, and the pursued man was too wrapped up in his own thoughts to heed what was passing around him.

He walked on indifferently through several streets. He was finally recalled to himself by a significant touch upon the arm. It was the face of Jerry Plummer that looked down meaningly into his.

Jerry led the way toward the open door of a hallway near them. Philip obediently followed. They walked back through the hall, to where it ended in a grassy yard. Here they halted, just beyond the rear door, Jerry first looking heedfully back, to make sure that there were no listening ears at hand.

"Where have you kept yourself?" he asked.

"I have been looking for you these two days."

"Have you? You know where I live."

"I didn't care to go there. It is not best for us to be seen together."

"I am not anxious to be seen with you; or to see you," retorted Philip.

"You are in the same boat with me," answered Jerry, with a grim laugh. "You will not find it so easy to get ashore, unless we go together. See here, Philip, I am anxious about that box. There is no report."

"Neither in the box, nor in the newspapers," rejoined Philip.

"It has gone wrong in some way," Jerry shook his head significantly. "I would give something neat to have it back again."

"But we are not known in it," replied Philip.

"The boy would never recognize you again. Why, your own mother wouldn't have known you."

"I am not so sure of that. When things start to go wrong there is no telling how far they may go. I would like to have it back."

"Tell the boy it was a mistake, and ask him to bring it back."

"That will never do. It may be in the hands of the police now. If I could only find out in some way what has happened."

"Very well. You're smart enough to devise a way," Philip indifferently answered. "Don't get me in it, for luck's dead against me. That burglary, you know, was a complete failure. I had one streak of luck, it is true, when I raised the money to take up that note. But the bottom has dropped out of that, too. Tried it again to-day, and it proved a dead failure. Then I bucked my last fifty dollars against faro, and what's the result? I'm worth just twenty-five cents."

"Take my advice, then, and play policy with that," laughed Jerry. "Or else go to work like honest men do. Trust me, I will think up some plan to trace that box. Let us get out of this."

They walked back through the hall, which still seemed deserted. Yet they had not reached the street ere a boy's head slipped slyly out from behind the open door at the rear. It was the head of Shadow Sam. He watched them until they had emerged into the street.

"That ambush paid," remarked the young sleuth. "Didn't hear all they said, but I got some p'int. Goin' to find out what the boy done with the box, eh? All right, Mr. Man, we'll see. Guess I ain't done with Phil Bounce yet."

He put himself again on that young gentleman's track.

CHAPTER X.

THE SHADOW SLIPS OUT OF A TRAP.

"PHILIP BOUNCE! You do not mean to say it was Philip—Bounce?"

This last word was spoken so vigorously that the nervous young woman addressed did bounce. She bounced completely out of her chair, and sat down again with a very much frightened face.

It was Miss Maria who spoke. She was followed by Miss Sophia.

"Young person, you should be ashamed of yourself to come here with such a story. That our dear nephew Philip, the only son of our dear brother Philip, could do such a thing! It is incredible!"

Young Mrs. Bounce felt anything but comfortable. She was a nervous little body, and there, bolt upright before her, sat the two maiden ladies, with faces as hard as iron, frowning down the story that she had dared to tell them. She really began to feel half-ashamed and to fancy that it must be a mistake that she was married to and deserted by Philip Bounce.

"It is incredible!" repeated Miss Maria.

"Where are your credentials, young woman?"

She doubtfully held out to them a paper which she had despairingly clutched in her hand. Miss Maria seized it and ran her eyes over it with a puzzled look.

"What does all this mean?" she asked. "I do not understand it."

"It was given me by the boy who brought me here," replied Mrs. Bounce. "He said you knew him, and that this was a letter of introduction. He said his name was Shadow Sam."

"Shadow Sam!" they repeated in chorus. "It seems it is to be nothing but Shadow Sam. He left something here the other day which we would give fifty dollars to have out of the house. And now he sends you here."

"And with such a letter as this," sneered Miss Sophia. "'Samuel Slocum, Esq., takes the enduring pleasure to introduce Mrs. Philip Bounce. Time's short and paper's scarce, and he'll leave Mrs. Philip Bounce to tell the story herself.' What ridiculous nonsense is this?"

She flung down the note with a sniff of disgust.

"It is all a plot, I believe," declared Miss Maria. "I hope we know our nephew better than that. And we know his worthy father would have trained him better."

Mrs. Bounce's nervousness by this time was quite gone. A red spot burned in either cheek, and there was a snap of anger in her eyes. She rose sharply from her chair, clasping the child closely to her breast.

"His worthy father!" she exclaimed, with bitter scorn. "Worthy of what, pray? Of the State Prison perhaps. If I had known in time what a worthy father Philip Bounce had, and what a worthy young man he was himself, I would have drowned myself before marrying him."

Her voice was full of satire and scorn.

"I tell you again that I am his wife, and that this is his child! I tell you that he has basely deserted me! But I will stay here no longer to be insulted by his purse-proud aunts. I have not asked you for help, and would beg before accepting it from you."

She swept with a grand movement toward the door, clasping her babe closely in her arms. The two maiden ladies exchanged looks. There was something peculiar in their expressions. Miss Maria made a significant sign to her sister.

"Stop!" cried the latter, springing up. "You are much too hot-tempered, my dear. We have not said we did not believe your story."

"I think you made your meaning very plain," came from the open door.

"But you gave us nothing to show that you were not an impostor. We believe you now, for you are certainly well acquainted with Philip Bounce, senior. But our nephew has always seemed so quiet and inoffensive."

"You do not know him. He has deceived you," was the fiercely-spoken answer. "If I turn back, do you accept me as his wife, and this babe as his child?"

"We are beginning to know him," replied Miss Maria, dryly. "Yes, come back, my dear. But you must prove your assertion. I presume you have a marriage-certificate?"

Meanwhile, Shadow Sam had returned to the office of the District Telegraph Company. He had been taking an "off" for the last two or three hours, and had passed a decidedly interesting time. What with discovering the deserted wife, leaving this unhappy woman with her husband's rich aunts, and overhearing an interesting conversation between Philip Bounce and Jerry Plummer, his time had been fully occupied.

"So he'd like to have that box back again," said Sam to himself. "All right. He knows where I reside. Jist let him call. I'll give it to him, muchly."

"Where have you been, Sam?" asked Mr. Brown, with some sharpness. "You don't mean

to say that you have been all this time delivering those circulars?"

"Private business," answered the lad, dryly. "Dock me two hours, Mr. Brown. I've had the worth of it in fun."

The day passed away without any other matter of interest. Sam was expecting some movement on the part of the man who had given him the box, but this shrewd personage was not ready to show his hand.

The next day passed, also, with no important change in the state of affairs. One of our characters, it is true, was slightly better off. Philip Bounce had taken Jerry's advice to play policy. Luck had befriended him, and he was now worth the immense sum of five dollars. He was divided in mind whether he would reinvest in a policy-shop, call at Downy's and put it up on faro, or pay a week's board-bill which he owed. There was a chance to turn it into a fifty on the cards. But there was an equal chance to turn it into nothing. And that might be followed by his being turned adrift, and forced to go hungry and bedless.

"Guess I'll go hunt up Furman and the boys," he at length concluded. "If I can rig up a game of skin eucher, I am good to double my pile. But I am afraid they will fight shy. I warped them too badly our last bout. By Jove, I only see two chances left to me now. If I can get my innocent aunts to dip into gold again I can feather my nest for awhile. And if I can get Lucy Mason to say yes, and marry me straight off, there's another gold mine opened. But I hope my country wife will keep away till I get my net set and my fish caught."

While he was devising these villainous schemes, and seeking the unsuspecting friends whom he hoped to victimize at card-play, the day had passed quietly at the District Telegraph office. It was near night when Shadow Sam returned from an errand on which he had been sent.

"Near supper time, Sam," said Mr. Brown. "But here is a job you can do on your way home. A package to be delivered at 70 Sansom. A friend of yours, too, I fancy, for he asked particularly that you should be sent. Said it was very important and he knew you could be trusted."

"He's a good deal too sweet," growled Sam. "Sendin' me more than a mile out of my way. Dunno whether I am to be trusted, when I'm hungry, and it's supper time. Where's the package, Mr. Brown? S'ppose I'll have to put her through."

The parcel was a very small one, that was some comfort. Sam thrust it into his pocket, and was quicky off.

It was a roundabout way home, and he hurried briskly along. His day's labor had given him a fine appetite and he did not care to waste time.

The place to which he had been directed proved to be a somewhat dilapidated building, cut up into numerous offices. It was very near night, and the halls and stairs were dark. Sam looked at the direction board near the door.

"'J. Smith, Fourth Story, back.' Why didn't he git on the seventh story at once?" growled the messenger boy. "I s'pose he would, if there'd been any seventh story,

Got to climb, I reckon, but I don't take it kindly."

He soon reached the fourth floor. The building seemed deserted. It was very dark here, and he had difficulty in making out the name of John Smith, on a door at the rear of the hall.

"All hunky," remarked Sam, as he knocked at the door. "Hope Mr. J. S. ain't stepped 'round the corner."

A cheerful "Come in!" settled Sam's doubts. He opened the door and entered.

But the boy could not avoid a slight start on seeing before him the man with the prominent nose and bushy whiskers, who had given him the questionable box.

He looked at him dubiously, while he extracted from his pocket the package with which he had been intrusted.

"Got somethin' here for Mr. John Smith," he said, as he tugged at the package. "Here it is."

"Where from, my boy?"

"Dunno," answered Sam, shortly. "Left at the Telegraph office. Good-night. Guess I'll slide."

"At the Telegraph office? I thought I knew you. Are you not Samuel Slocum, to whom the Misses Bounce sent a box as a present a few days ago?"

"That's me; Samuel Slocum, Esquire."

"It was I who gave you that box."

The speaker was between Sam and the door.

"I know it," answered Sam, quietly.

"I hope it was something worth while," rejoined the man, with an effort at a smile. "What did you find in your box, my young friend?"

Despite the soft tone of his questioner, Sam was beginning to smell a mouse. There was something queer about the whole proceeding. The boy took his cue instantly.

"Dunno what was in it," he answered carelessly. "Nothin' of no account, I guess. Them old women ain't none too kind that way, 'bout givin' presents."

"But did you not open it to see?" there was a concealed anxiety in the question.

"Not much," and Sam thrust his hands deep into his pockets. "I swapped it off unsight unseen, with Billy Barly, down at the office. The little rascal shut my eye up, too. All he guv was a paper of mixt candy, that hadn't three good bites in it. I had a big notion to go back on the swap; but that wouldn't be square, you know. A trade's a trade."

The man looked curiously at Sam. He was rather doubtful just how much of this story to believe. He thought it his cue to laugh, however.

"It is a question who got sold worst, you or Bill," he pleasantly remarked. "But didn't he open the box?"

"No. We've had more fun than a little with that box, up at the office." Sam's voice was innocently confidential. "Bill's been tryin' to sell it to the boys, on a spec. Like they sell the Adams Express packages, you know. But the boys don't bite, worth a cent. Bill wants fifty cents for it, and he ain't had more than ten cents bid. It's on a shelf in the office now.

Bill's goin' to open it to-morrow, if he don't git his selling price sooner. Well, guess I'll go. It's 'bout supper time, and I'm ready for it, I tell you."

There was a momentary hesitation in Sam's questioner, as the boy walked with an unsuspecting manner to the door. But, Jerry Plummer, for it was he, was very well satisfied that if the box had been opened somebody would have been blown up. And Sam's story seemed as good a reason as any why it had not been opened. Boys are not generally very slow about examining presents.

These thoughts rushed like a flash through the villain's head, as he stepped aside, and opened the way to the door.

"Good-night, my boy! On duty to-night?" he asked.

"No. This is my night off. Good-night, Mr. Smith."

Sam was not long in getting down-stairs and into the street.

"Tell you what, Sam Slocum," he said to himself, "that was a rat-trap, and you was the rat. If you'd jist nibbled once at John Smith's cheese you'd been nabbed, sure. Don't like to lie, I know. But there is places where the truth has to be dealt out very gingerly. Dunno what that long-nosed devil might have done, if I hadn't shut his eye up with that little fairy story 'bout the swop."

Sam made the best of his way home, glad to be safely on the street.

An hour afterward a long-nosed man, with heavy black whiskers, and a slouched hat, called at the District Telegraph office, and had a little conversation with Mr. Brown.

"You gave the boy the wrong box by mistake," said the operator, in doubt. "You want to exchange it. He traded it off with Bill Barly, and so it went on a shelf in the office. Is that his story?"

"Yes," was the anxious response.

"But, my dear sir, Shadow must have been carrying out his name. The whole story is a fiction. There is no such box here."

He had some difficulty in convincing his visitor of this fact, and the latter was a very anxious and a very much r'iled man as he went away. He had been sold very cheap by Shadow Sam.

CHAPTER XI.

PHILIP BOUNCE GETS A START.

SAM was perched on a high office stool, his hat driven savagely down over his eyes, and a look of preternatural importance upon his face. Opposite him sat Mr. Brown, the telegraph operator, on a very low chair, and looking very meek. One would have said he was a school-boy who had badly failed in his lessons; and that Sam was the hard-hearted teacher.

"Mr. Brown," remarked Sam. "I've stuck pretty close to business lately, now ain't I?"

"Why, yes, Sam. No one can say that you have not done your duty."

"Like a gentleman and a Christian," supplied Sam. "Well, then, Mr. Brown, it's kind of hard for a boy like me to stick to it so close. If you ain't got no objection I'd like to take two or three days' loaf."

"Loaf? You loaf? Shadow Sam, the pride of the office? Why, I thought better of you than that. What's adrift in your brain now, Sam? Want to go a-fishing, eh?"

"Yes, a-fishin' after rascals," answered the boy. "I've told you a bit of what's up, Mr. Brown. If you don't mind I'll tell you the balance."

"All right," laughed Mr. Brown, "I'm agreeable. Let me hear it."

The young Shadow proceeded to tell the whole story of his connection with Philip Bounce, and of the mysterious operations of the disguised man who called himself by the uncommon name of John Smith.

"Now, see here, Mr. Brown," concluded Sam, "that there chap put it onto me heavy. He had the impudence to declare he wasn't a burglar, when I said he was. What do you think of that, sir?"

"It was a most extraordinary case of impudence," answered Mr. Brown, trying his best to look grave.

"He guv me the lie, you see. And that's not the worst. Him, and the other one that calls himself John Smith, they tried to blow me up with that box. And they're at it yet. Didn't they try to trap me, t'other night? Tell you what, Mr. Brown, this thing is played out. It's my turn now. I'm bound to get a ring in Phil Bounce's nose."

"But you do not know what was in the box, Sam. Why not take it to the police station, and have it examined? If it proves what you suspect, then have them arrested."

"Haven't got that John Smith nailed right yet," and Sam shook his head doubtfully. "Only want three days' loaf, and I've a notion I'll fetch 'em. Took Phil Bounce's wife and child square into his aunt's house, and the old ladies have jist froze to the baby. I'm 'feard it'll be hot weather for Phil when he goes 'round that way ag'in. And that's not all, Mr. Brown. There's another bit of work that I've dropped on that's goin' to make things howl. You know the rich Masons, down Spruce street?"

"Yes. What of them?"

"I'm kind of acquainted down there, you know. Well, I've twigged Phil Bounce soft-soaping around Lucy Mason. He's jist makin' love to her, that's the truth. Now, do you s'pose I'm goin' to stand that, Mr. Brown?"

"Making love to her? And he a married man?"

"It's a tony job, Mr. Brown. Now ain't it? But he's barking up the wrong tree, though he don't know it. Lucy Mason and me's kind of thick. Why, every time I take anything down there she smiles as sweet as if I was her first cousin. Hope you don't s'pose I'm goin' to let Phil Bounce come it over that nice little girl? I think not."

"He must be a rascal, Sam. That's a fact."

"You bet he is. Between you and me, Mr. Brown, I've posted Lucy Mason. I've been down there. She took it kind of hard at first, for she was a bit soft on Phil. But she come in when I laid down the law to her. Jist let him go 'round there again, and he'll find that salt ain't sugar. I've got jist the neatest little game laid out that you ever heerd of."

"What is it, Sam? None of you tricks, I hope."

Sam proceeded to tell the plot he had laid, a plot the reader must wait a little while to unfold itself. It was one, however, which Mr. Brown quite approved of, and he did not hesitate to grant Sam the holiday asked for.

Meanwhile affairs were not going as smoothly with Philip Bounce as that worthy could have desired. He had arranged the little card game with Jonas Furman, and that gentleman's friends, but fortune had proved unfavorable. Despite Phil's cute way of handling these uncertain little papers, his antagonists managed to get the most ridiculously good hands. In consequence, the unlucky gambler found himself reduced again to a bare twenty-five cents.

All this he duly represented to Jerry Plummer, with the hope of softening the hard heart of that gentleman.

"I've had confounded bad luck, Jerry, you see," declared Phil. "But I've got a sure dodge laid out now. I am going to buck faro the first chance, and I'll bet you high I break the bank. It's bound to work."

"Go ahead," returned Jerry. "I've no objections."

"But the rascally feature of the case is this," persisted Phil. "My own bank has gone to smash. I'm bound to win, Jerry, but I want the funds to invest, and I am ready to share with the capitalist who supplies the cash. Come, old boy, fork me over a cool fifty."

"Hardly, Phil. That cat won't jump. I can raise you some on your note, as I did before. But my friend won't be satisfied without a good indorsement."

Philip looked at him sourly.

"So you want me to try forgery again, eh? That cat won't jump, either, Jerry Plummer. You are deuced anxious to get a hold on me, though I don't know what for. You have some chestnuts that I am to pull out of the fire for you, I see that. It was you put me up to that burglary, and got that confounded boy on my track."

A look of anxiety came upon Jerry's face.

"By the way, how about the boy?" asked Phil. "You were going to settle him, I believe. But he does not seem to be settled."

"He is an infernal little rogue!" blurted out Jerry. "I laid the neatest trap for him; and caught him in it too. But, would you believe it, the young hound lied with such a smooth face that I swallowed it. I, Jerry Plummer, that can scent a lie at a hundred paces, swallowed that boy's story whole. He gave such a good boy's reason for not opening the box that I believed him, and let him slide."

"And it proved to be a lie?"

"Yes. The neatest kind of a lie. But Shadow Sam, as he calls himself, won't slip me quite so easy. If he is not kind enough to blow himself up, I will find some way to silence him."

"Oh, drop the boy. Come, Jerry, make it a ten. I will pay you back to-morrow."

"How about that rich heiress you were courting?"

"I have her all right. I am going to pop the question this afternoon. But I want a few

shiners in my pocket. Enough to buy an engagement ring."

"Try your aunts then."

"So I will. Lend me a ten, and I will get it from them to-morrow."

Jerry shook his head doubtfully.

"I am afraid of both plans," he replied. "I don't like to trust my cash on the chance of a girl's saying yes; or a brace of angry old women letting up on their dissolute nephew. Why not go through their house again. You failed before. You may succeed next time."

"Very well. If the other two plans fail, I will try that as a last chance. I have a notion where they keep their valuables. Hand over, Jerry."

"I fear it is a poor security," answered the elder villain. "But I always was a good-natured fool. I will let you have a five."

"Ten, you sordid miser."

"Five."

"Ten, I say. I will pay you fifty per cent interest."

"Five. You will save on the interest."

"I don't want to save on the interest."

"But I do on the principal. Five or nothing, Phil. And I prefer the latter."

"Oh, pass over your five, then. It's worse than tooth-drawing to get a stake out of you, you old villain."

Jerry laughed as if he found this a high compliment. He handed a five dollar bill to his young associate.

"That is the last, Phil. You will have to earn your cash in future."

"All right," answered Phil lightly. "See if I don't have a fifty before an hour. Good-day, Jerry." He walked gayly from the room.

Jerry looked sourly after him.

"Confound him," he muttered. "He is a keen young rogue. But I will get him under my thumb yet, sharp as he is."

Meanwhile Shadow Sam was busy. In fact he had opened a communication with Lucy Mason, to whom Philip Bounce was paying very warm attentions, and had succeeded in convincing her of the dubious character of her lover. The young lady had an engagement with this interested lover at six o'clock that evening, and affairs were so close between them that she fully expected a declaration of love from him during that visit.

Being satisfied now of his villainy, she had arranged a little drama with Sam, to come off on that interesting occasion. It was a sort of surprise party for Philip Bounce.

Yet, quite oblivious of this state of affairs, the young gentleman called duly at the hour appointed at the elegant Spruce street mansion of his lady love.

The parlor was large, dusk, cool; decidedly the place for a love scene.

"Yet Phil seemed at first ill at ease. He was nervous and slightly irritable, and conversed all round the compass as far as possible from the subject to which Lucy was very willing to bring him.

The truth was that the venturesome gambler had invested his five dollars on faro and his sure plan had unaccountably gone wrong. He was

reduced to his normal sum of twenty-five cents, and felt out of sorts in consequence.

Lucy Mason, a fair-faced, plump little body, quite ready to be loved, yet shrewd with it all, snuggled closer to Phil, and looked inquiringly into his eyes.

"What has gone wrong?" she softly asked. "You are not like yourself to-day. You are troubled about something."

"Oh, a mere trifle," he replied. "It doesn't take much to put a fellow out of sorts this weather. Do you know you are looking remarkably bright to-day."

He slipped closer to her upon the sofa.

"None of that now," she laughed. "I have told you often I would have no flattery."

"Flattery indeed! It is the solid truth. And, Lucy—"

He was now very close.

"Well?" she asked, with questioning eyes.

"I saw you with Harry Hudson yesterday. And—I thought—you were unusually agreeable with him."

"Suppose I was? Have I not a right to treat gentlemen pleasantly?"

"Oh, I do not mean that. But—but I could not help feeling a little jealous. You never treat me so, Lucy.—And you know I love you! I have shown you fifty times how I love you! I believe, I hope, that you are not quite indifferent to me."

He had come so unexpectedly to the point that it almost took her breath. He now held her hand, and was looking with warm fervor into her eyes. She drew back a little, rather coldly.

"Excuse me, Mr. Bounce. I do not know that I have had any special reason to think so. It seems to me that this is a new subject of conversation between us."

"I have loved you ever since I first saw you," he declared. "I must have shown it. Tell me, dear Lucy, is not my love returned? But it must be. I have seen it in your eyes."

"What unfortunate eyes I must have!" she coldly replied. "Release my hand, Mr. Bounce; you hurt me. I am much obliged for your avowal; but will you kindly answer me a few questions?"

"Certainly!" he exclaimed, somewhat ill at ease. He did not understand her manner.

"You are almost a stranger, you know."

"But I can give you every evidence as to who I am. Besides, you know my aunts. As to my former life—"

"Exactly," she interrupted. "It is that I refer to. There are some strange stories afloat, Mr. Bounce, of—a former wife and child."

He had been bending forward, looking eagerly into her eyes. But this shot took him like a pistol-ball. He fell back suddenly, his face reddening to his hair.

"Who has told you that?" he cried, hoarsely. "It is a lie! It is a lie, Lucy Mason, whoever has told you!"

"I have good evidence of it," was her quiet answer.

"What evidence, Lucy?" He was recovering his assurance. "Let me know just how far the lie has gone, so that I can nail it. Show me your evidence."

"You deny it, then?"

"Yes, utterly."

"I think I can convince you, Philip Bounce. You ask me to show the evidence. Look for yourself. Yonder it is!"

As he spoke one of the window curtains rose and a beam of sunlight illuminated the room. His eyes followed the direction of her pointing finger to the door, which stood partly open. And in this opening appeared, as if hovering in the air, the form of a pretty child, which smiled sunnily as its eyes fell upon him.

"Do you admit the evidence, Philip Bounce?"

"Good heavens! That child! My child!"

With extended hands and starting eyes he backed step by step, gazing with a stunned aspect on the infant. His face had changed from red to deadly pale.

In this way he reached another door of the room. It opened to his touch. With a cry of mingled fear and rage he rushed out, utterly overwhelmed by the astounding vision.

Lucy sprung up and clapped her hands. Instantly through the open door came the slight figure of Mrs. Bounce, whose unseen hands had held the seemingly floating child. At the same moment, from under the window certain, came Shadow Sam.

"If that ain't as good as ice-cream and pound cake, then I'm no judge," laughed the latter. "Did you ever see a nice young man took more sudden?"

CHAPTER XII.

A BRACE OF SURPRISES.

SHADOW SAM resided at No. 10 Plum street. He was not the only one of the family. There were a dignified Mr. and Mrs. Slocum, and a fair sprinkling of young Slocums, boys and girls, a tumbling, rattling set of little busy-bodies, who had a perfect genius for finding or manufacturing mischief.

Sam was the eldest of this flock, and the only one who took part in making the living of the family. He felt the dignity of his position accordingly, and was a little inclined to make the young fry stand around.

"Now don't you be botherin' me, Billy Slocum," he cried to his twelve-year-old brother. "You know I've got to tend to business. We merchants ain't expected to know anything about geography."

"You ain't no merchant," exclaimed Billy, very doubtfully.

"I ain't, eh? Well, I'm very glad to hear that. Had a queer notion I was."

"What is a merchant, Sammy?"

"What is a merchant? Why, a merchant is— Mom, you got my lunch put up? It's 'bout time I was off—a merchant is a chap as—as— what are you making them faces for, Billy? S'pose I'm goin' to post you 'bout what a merchant is? Jist wait till you git old enough to understand it."

"Don't believe you know," jeered Billy, running out of Sam's reach.

"Show you if I don't, if I only had time," threatened Sam. "Say, Mom, you know that box I left up in my room, with my name on the paper? Did the man ever call for it that was to git it?"

"Yes, Sammy. He was here yesterday. He had big black whiskers, just as you said. And a slouch hat pulled down over his eyes. He seemed very glad to get it."

"Did he?" remarked Sam. "I've a notion he'll feel kind of sorry 'fore he gets through with it. Good-mornin', Mom. Tell you all 'bout it when I come home."

Sam slipped his lunch package into his pocket, slapped his hat down over his ears, struck up the merry air of "Little Buttercup" in a clear whistle, and was off for business. He always came into and went out of the house like a breeze.

"So old black whiskers has got the box at last?" said the boy to himself, as he hurried along the street. "I s'pose he thinks he has shut Sam Slocum's eyes up slick. All right, Mr. John Smith; but look out you don't git your eyes opened."

An hour or so after the time that Sam thus cheerily pushed his way along the street, the person of whom he had just spoken was otherwise occupied. He had just admitted Philip Bounce into his house. There was a look of triumph upon his sinister face, in strong contrast with the depressed expression of his younger associate.

"Hey! Phil! What's gone wrong?" he cried. "Have you got the toothache, or a dead grandfather?"

"Everything is wrong," answered Phil, dejectedly. "First, my trick at faro didn't work. There was a confounded run of bad luck. I'm cleaned out again, Jerry, dry as gunpowder."

"I knew that," laughed Jerry. "I never saw a trick at faro yet that worked for anybody except the bank."

"But that's not the worst," sighed Phil. "There's a terrible screw loose in another quarter."

"Hillo! I see what it is. Lucy Mason has jilted you. The rich wife dodge has dropped through. Come, Phil, don't let that discourage you. I thought that you knew women better than that. They say no to-day, so they can make yes sound sweeter to-morrow."

"The dog's dead," answered Phil, gloomily. "She didn't bother herself to say no. She got up a tableau for me, Jerry."

"A tableau?"

"My baby, Jerry! There was my own baby, floating in the air like an angel without wings! You never saw a worse scared man than I was. I went out as if I'd been shot out of a cannon."

"But what was it? Some trick?"

"I suppose so," gloomily. "I fancy my wife has followed me here, and is on my track. There's only one thing for it. I must make a stake out of my aunts, and then clear for the West. This town is getting too hot to hold me."

"Your luck does seem to be off, indeed," said Jerry, with an air as if he rather enjoyed it.

"I don't see that yours is any better," retorted Phil. "There's that dynamite box still afloat. You are shaking in your boots this minute, for fear the police have it, and may sweep down on you. That boy has been too much for you, smart as you are."

"I fancy not," answered Jerry, with an air of triumph.

"And why not, pray?"

"Because I've got the box, that's all. I proved too sharp for Shadow Sam."

"You have the box?"

"Just so. I was about opening it when you came in."

"The deuce you were! Wait till I go out, then, before you put that little job through. I don't care to be about when you open that box."

Jerry laughed knowingly.

"Don't fear, Phil. I know how to handle it. It is safe enough in my hands. Come, I will show you the trick."

He pressed down hard on the back part of the sliding lid, and drew it carefully off. Phil bent over the box. The confidence of his associate had removed his fears. In a moment more the cover was removed and they both looking into the open box.

Jerry had promised Phil a surprise. But the surprise was certainly a double-barreled one. For, instead of the peculiar arrangement which he expected to see, there was nothing met their eyes but a slip of drawing-paper stretched just under the sliding-lid. And on this paper was a neatly outlined drawing of a boy, with the unmistakable face of Sam Slocum. And, worst of all, this figure had the thumb of one hand at the nose, and the fingers stretched out in a most disrespectful manner, while from the mouth seemed to come the words: "Compliments of Shadow Sam to Mr. John Smith. Hope this will find you enjoying yourself."

If curses had any sting, Shadow Sam would have felt a twinge even at the distance he was from his foe, for Jerry made the air blue with oaths. He flung the insulting box to the floor and crushed it under his heel.

"Don't laugh at me, Phil Bounce," he cried fiercely. "It is no laughing matter; as you may find. This boy's trick shows that the cat is out of the bag, and that we are both in danger."

"Not much," declared Phil. "I am only a silent partner in that job. Slocum Sam has proved too much for you, that's flat."

"Curse him! I'll settle him!"

"I'm clear of it, at any rate. I am going to bleed my aunts and strike for the West. Your Philadelphia air does not agree with my constitution."

He was not long reaching his aunts' house, in De Lancey Place. He rung the bell confidently, and was quickly admitted. Phil was never troubled with a lack of confidence. He had no doubt he could bamboozle the innocent old ladies. Or if that did not work, an appeal to their generosity would.

Yet it was not very assuring to be received by them sitting bolt upright in their chairs, and with a look of doubly-starched severity upon their faces. A shadow came over Phil's hopes. He felt that it was a critical moment, and dashed in with the utmost vivacity.

"How d'ye do, aunties?" he exclaimed. "Glad to see you looking so well and so jolly. Don't say a word about my not being here for the last week. I know you are going to blame me for it, but I couldn't help it; I really couldn't. Been up to my ears in business. Over my head, in fact. I'd have been drowned outright, only I'm

a first-class swimmer. Do you know I had the most confounded ill-luck with that investment of yours? If I'd only bought on a week's option now, I could have made you a cool thousand apiece. Old Bismarck signed the treaty, just as I knew he would, and up boomed gold. Unluckily he was a day late about it, and our margins were swept out. But a fig for that. That's the way gold works. We go in again and things work smooth; and bless you how the money rattles in. It's a sure thing, if you have the heart to keep it up."

"Sure to lose," continued the grim lady. "We have lost our investment and learned wisdom. I fancy you have lost all yours too, without learning wisdom."

"Oh, a man will be down in his luck now and then," Phil airily answered. "I am not well primed now, I confess. Tell you what it is, aunties, I've a notion to pull up stakes and travel. Business is too slow hereaways. Chicago is my field. Put me on the Chicago board and I will be a rich man in a month. See here, aunt Ri, I want you to loan me enough for traveling expenses, and a week's board bill. I will be on my feet in a week, and send it back. Say a fifty, and your nephew won't bother you soon again, I promise you."

"We do not mean to be hard with you, Philip. We have something here which we know will delight your heart to have with you on your western journey."

An uneasy feeling shot across Phil's mind as his aunt walked gravely to the rear door of the room. There was a significance in her tone which he did not quite relish. But there was no time to ask explanations, for in the next instant the door flung open, and there, before his astounded eyes, stood the form of his deserted wife, holding the child in her arms. And, dimly visible behind her stood Shadow Sam, with his fingers to his nose, as he had appeared in the drawing in the box.

"This is the pleasant surprise we had prepared for you," remarked Miss Maria, blandly. "I hope you will enjoy this lady's company to Chicago."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RIFLING OF THE CHEST.

PHIL BOUNCE was beginning to get tired of tableaux. They were getting decidedly monotonous; particularly that sort in which his wife and child figured as the principal actors.

It's so neat a method to get rid of a wife and child by running away from them, that Phil had thought himself rather smart, and had enjoyed the neat surprise he had prepared for Mrs. Bounce. But the tables were slightly turned when he found that Mrs. Bounce had run after him and was preparing neat surprises for him.

She had spoiled both his cherished plans. His idea of marrying a rich wife, bleeding her of all the cash he could handle, and leaving her in the lurch, had completely failed. His second idea of getting cash from his aunts to pay his way West, had likewise failed. Yet he must get off in some way. The town was not big enough to hold him and that precious baby at the same time. There was but one plan left. He had not forgotten how to get clandestinely into his aunts'

house. He must repeat the burglary, make a stake in that manner, and slide away for wild Western scenes.

Midnight came that night as it comes all nights, but it was not a midnight of the same complexion. Outside there was not a star in the sky, while the moon had been snuffed out since ten o'clock. Thick clouds covered the firmament. A gusty wind soughed through the trees. Faint pattering sounds told of the first steps of coming rain. It was a night for all to be in their beds who had beds to go to.

Inside the Bounce mansion everything was quiet. The old ladies had even permitted themselves to go to sleep, which was a thing unheard of when they had a subject of affright. But with Shadow Sam in the house they did not feel as nervous as usual, and let slumber steal upon their eyelids.

As for Sam himself he had ideas of his own. It seemed to him very natural that the baffled villain might have revengeful projects against his wife, who had so signally destroyed his schemes. The boy therefore stationed himself at the door of the room occupied by Mrs. Bounce and the baby, as the point where a sentinel was most needed.

Sam was determined not to go to sleep. He had ransacked the old chest, and armed himself with the pistol, replacing its contents without disturbing the box.

"A boy with a pistol is worth a man with a pistol," he muttered. "And more, too, if he fires quicker. He's got to keep wide awake, though, and that's what I'm going to do."

And he did it with a vengeance, for before an hour he was as sound asleep as though there were a ton weight on each eye.

The hours glided on. Midnight was followed by the stroke of one. Two followed in its due time. The rain outside, which had been falling heavily, had now slackened. But the wind was more violent than ever. Its noise, however, did not trouble anybody within. Sleep there ruled supreme. From Sam to Dinah everybody was as unconscious as though a spell had been thrown upon the mansion.

Was everybody asleep? There were sounds that spoke differently. A slight noise as of the lifting of a sash. Stealthy feet pattering softly over the floor. The quiet unlocking of a door. Creaking sounds such as Sam had once before heard on such a night, but which he was past hearing now. And nobody was likely to waken from these vague sounds, for they were nearly drowned in the gusty noises outside.

Up-stairs they came, and along the carpeted passage of the second floor. Matters promised badly for Sam's reputation as a faithful sentinel, yet still he slept on unknowingly.

The midnight prowler had gained the rear room, which contained the chest in which the pistol was usually put out of harm's way. A slight scratching noise was heard. A match kindled, and in a moment more a low gas jet was burning. Its faint light revealed the face of the burglar, who was no other than Philip Bounce.

He was quickly at work removing the contents of the chest, which he quietly heaped upon the floor. The bottom was soon reached, and he

drew out his hand, which held a neatly-folded package, wrapped in white paper. He took it to the light.

"Private papers of M. & S. Bounce!"

"By all that's good, I've hit on a bonanza!" he thought. "The stingy old pair, who would see their nephew starve before they'd lend him a farthing! Won't I squeeze them now? I would have let them off with a fifty. They shall fork out a cool thousand before they get hold of this prize again. And I know their ways. I bet there is cash in it as well as papers."

He carefully deposited his prize in a capacious pocket, and hastened to replace the contents of the chest. Little did he dream of what he had really found, or of the roundabout way in which fate was returning this precious gift to its original possessors.

The burglar hesitated as if in doubt what next to do. Should he be satisfied with his good fortune, and leave the house? Or should he risk a further search?

Just what his purpose was he could not have told himself, but he turned out the light which he had kindled, and groped his way forward along the wall. He knew the house too well to need any light.

He was suddenly interrupted by stumbling over some object on the floor. He had difficulty to keep himself from falling, while a loud groaning sound came from the object. Phil was still seeking to recover his footing when he felt the thing move beneath him, and a hand grasp his leg.

With a sudden impulse of fear he tore himself loose, and dashed for the head of the stairs. And he had reason for speed, for just as he gained this point the sharp report of a pistol was heard, and a bullet whizzed past his ears.

Down the stairs he dashed, followed by an uproar of sounds. The cries of terrified voices, the slamming of doors, the sound of hurrying feet, another sharp report, and the whiz of a bullet after him.

Almost with a bound he reached the first floor, caught up his shoes, which he had left there, and dashed for the door.

Quick steps followed him down the stairs, the pistol again cracked spitefully, Sam's yells of "Stop thief!" were echoed by screams in women's voices. Pandemonium seemed to have broken loose.

Need of haste as there was the flying burglar did not lose his presence of mind. He had already unlocked the front door. He now hastily withdrew the key, inserted it in the outside of the lock, and locked the door after him, just as another bullet buried itself in the hard oak of the portal.

Sam was making good practice with his revolver.

He reached the door almost as soon as the key was turned, but it refused to open to his hand. He jerked and kicked for an instant, and then realized how he had been baffled. His next impulse was to run for the front windows, fling them open and dash into the street.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE OPENING OF THE BOX.

SAM'S efforts to get out of the house had wasted precious time. The refusal of the door

to open, the stiffness of the shutter bolts, the moment lost in running from door to window, had given the fugitive a precious start. When Sam got his head out of the window he caught a dim sight of the thief, turning a corner half a square off. With spiteful haste he fired the two remaining shots in the pistol, one of them hitting a door-knob across the street, and the other flying straight for a steeple, a half-mile away. The fugitive had no need to quicken his pace for those shots.

"Guess I'd be a good shot if I had some more practice," thought Sam. "But that chap don't do things on the square. He don't give a feller no chance to take aim."

At this moment a policeman ran briskly up to the door.

"What is the matter?" he cried. "What is all the shooting about?"

"A burglar," returned Sam, as he sprung lightly through the window. "He jist skooted round that corner. Come on, we'll rope him in yet!"

The active boy darted away like a young deer, followed by the policeman, who had great difficulty to keep up with him. The corner in question was soon reached, but no one was in sight. They hurried on to the next corner, but with the same result.

"You run down that way," directed Sam. "I'll try the street over here."

But the pursuit was without effect. Fifteen minutes afterward, Sam, returning to the house from one direction, met the policeman returning from the other.

"What luck?" asked Sam.

"None at all. I didn't see a shadow. What luck had you?"

"Didn't see the shadow of a shadow," rejoined Sam.

From inside the house came little screams, and cries of alarm. Night-capped heads protruded at the windows. At the open door appeared the jet-black face of Dinah, too sleepy to be scared.

"Oh, what has happened?" exclaimed Miss Maria. "Oh my, what a flutter I am in!"

"I shall never get over it. Never," declared Miss Sophia.

"Where are they? How many of them did you kill?" asked Miss Maria.

"I hope there are no dead bodies in the house," protested Miss Sophia.

"No," answered Sam dryly. "I've had them all carried off by the undertakers. Only killed three or four, anyhow."

The policeman looked at him in surprise. He was of the kind who can never see a joke.

"What do you mean, boy?" he asked, severely. "You did not kill any?"

"I would, anyhow, if they'd only waited," retorted Sam. "I never was good at shootin' on the wing."

"Is there any blood in the house?" demanded Miss Sophia, in a tone of horror. "Oh, do come in, gentlemen, and see if there is any blood in the house!"

"Come in and search," entreated Miss Maria. "There may be more of them in hiding. I shall never sleep a wink till the house is searched."

Thus entreated, Sam and the policeman entered, the former armed with his empty pistol, the latter brandishing his club. Candles were furnished, and they examined the house thoroughly from cellar upward. But no trace was found of any confederates of the burglar. Here and there were the marks of Sam's pistol practice. A bullet had buried itself in the front door, another in the wall of the passage, a third had broken a pane of glass in a rear window; but, fortunately for the nerves of the ladies, no scattered blood was found, and no dead bodies lying around loose.

The effort to find whether any depredations had been committed met with the same result. All the cherished silver spoons of the good ladies remained intact, and not a coffee-pot or tea-urn was missing.

"Mighty lucky I was here, though," remarked Sam. "Don't b'lieve he meant no good to Mrs. Bounce and the baby. He must have been feelin' for their door when he come tumblin' over me. I was lyin' there meditatin', and I didn't take it in right away."

"There has been some meddling here," said the policeman, pointing to the chest in the spare room, the lid of which stood open.

"Was there anything valuable here?"

"No," answered Miss Sophia. "Oh, mercy! there was that box! Maybe he has taken that box!"

"What box?" demanded the officer.

But Sam was already rummaging deeply among the contents of the chest. He looked up at length with a scared face.

"It is gone!" he announced.

"Oh, save us! He will be blown to atoms! Our poor nephew will be blown to atoms! Oh, can nothing be done?"

"What is it?" demanded the policeman, again.

"Come with me!" cried Sam, sharply. "We may be in time to save him! Come, I'll tell you as we go along."

Sam was so sharp and arbitrary that the officer followed him without further question, convinced there must be some important reason for this great haste, but at a loss to know what it was.

"I know where he lives," explained Sam, as they hurried on. "I ain't quite sure what's in that box, but I've a notion if he opens it there'll be a first-class earthquake."

"What box?" demanded the vexed policeman.

"Why, didn't I tell you all about it?"

"No, you haven't said a word."

Thus admonished Sam told the story of the dynamite box, and the effort to destroy him, and how it had strangely fallen back into the hands that sent it.

"It would serve them right then if they did blow themselves up," remarked the officer.

"But I don't see any need of this hurry. Do you suppose they won't know their own work when they see it?"

They had now gone a considerable distance from the house. They were passing through a narrow street, with medium-sized houses. Sam commenced to explain how it was the disguised John Smith that had prepared the box, and that

Phil Bounce likely knew nothing about it. But in the midst of his explanation he was interrupted by a sudden and frightful uproar.

First came a loud explosion, like the peal of a park of artillery, accompanied by a blinding flash. Fragments of broken glass rattled like small shot on the stones of the street, and the walls of the houses. The upper front wall of one of the buildings curved suddenly outward, and then tumbled with a thundering crash into the street, sending up a thick cloud of dust. Something struck Sam on the head and prostrated him. The astonished officer looked quickly around for this missile and was horror-struck to perceive a bleeding human arm, torn off at the shoulder, the clinched fist of which had struck and felled the boy.

In a moment more loud cries of terror came from the wrecked house, while windows were flung open in all directions, from which frightened voices emerged in a thousand tones of alarm. Sam had recovered his feet, and stood looking askance at the bleeding arm.

"Wonder if that's John Smith, punching me in the head?" he muttered.

But we must go back a little in our story, to trace the cause of this terrific explosion.

It is closely connected with Phil Bounce's midnight burglary. When this amateur house-breaker ran away from the spiteful popping of Sam's pistol he had no well-defined plan in his mind. To get safely away was the main thing in view, and he ran through street after street with his utmost speed, not knowing how quick and sharp pursuit might be.

His own residence, for which he was making, was at a considerable distance, and he wished to lose no time in getting under shelter. Unexpectedly he found himself in the narrow street in which Jerry Plummer resided, and the recollection came to him that he had a pass-key to the door of this mansion.

"A good thought," he cried. "I will strike into Jerry's till the danger is over."

No sooner said than done. In a moment he had opened the door and slipped within. He was safe from pursuit.

Phil was pretty well acquainted with the interior economy of this house, and readily made his way through it in the dark.

He made his way softly up-stairs and opened the door of the front room from which the light came. There, beside a table, sat Jerry Plummer, bending intently over some object that lay before him. He was but half dressed, his shirt sleeves rolled up above the elbow, while a lighted pipe on the table near him showed that he had been indulging in the weed.

He looked up with a start of surprise on hearing footsteps at the door.

"It's only me, Jerry," said Phil, assuringly. "Thought I'd make an evening call."

Phil drew up a chair to the opposite side of the table and proceeded to tell the story of his night's operations, and capture of the box.

After some further conversation, Jerry requested to see the box in question, and Phil triumphantly withdrew it from the capacious pocket in which he had deposited it. It formed a package of some two inches square by five in length, and neatly wrapped in white paper, on

which were written the words: "Private papers of M. & S. Bounce."

Jerry looked at it with interest.

"Why, you do seem to have hit on a prize," he remarked. "Open it, Phil, and let us see what it contains."

"Some cash, I hope," answered Phil, as he proceeded to untie the confining cord.

The knot opened, he quickly removed the paper envelope and flung it on the table, with the side which had been turned within now upward. There was revealed a rough wooden box with a sliding lid.

But Jerry's eyes had fallen on the paper, attracted by some writing which he observed on this exposed portion.

"It might pass for the dynamite box," laughed Phil, his hand on the sliding cover.

"Samuel Slocum," read Jerry; then with a yell of terror, "Stop! For the Lord's sake, stop!"

He never finished the word, for at that instant Phil had drawn back the lid.

There came a blinding flash; a terrific roar; a crash of glass; a surging outward of the walls; a rending of the furniture into splinters; and a tossing of the fragments of two torn human bodies to every point of the compass.

Sam Slocum was revenged. The box of dynamite meant for him had returned, by a strange fatality, to its designers. Their own murderous engine had destroyed themselves.

But Jerry Plummer's arm, with its clinched fist, had struck Sam prostrate in the street; another strange freak of fate.

CHAPTER XV.

THE END OF IT ALL.

The scene inside the house was frightful. The room in which the explosion took place had been rent into fragments.

The box had been overcharged with dynamite, and the explosion, in consequence, had been terrific. A very volcano of fire and ruin seemed to have broken out in that wrecked room.

The remains of the two men were gathered up, as far as was possible, and a coroner's inquest held upon them, at which Shadow Sam was a principal witness. Most of the facts told in this story came out at the inquest, though some of the points connected with Philip Bounce were suppressed, at the earnest desire of his aunts.

The general verdict was, however, "served them right," and the messenger detective became for a time a hero. Yet the public blamed the older more than the younger villain, it being considered that he had tempted the young man into the crime.

We have little more to say to wind up this over true narrative. Two of our main characters had effectually disposed of themselves, and we need only give a brief attention to the remainder.

Miss Maria and Sophia Bounce continue to dwell in their De Lancey Place mansion, tenfold more queer and nervous than ever. They had been so many years waiting for a burglar to come, and had cried "wolf" when there was no wolf so often, that they felt on the whole

rather proud of having had a real live burglar in the family. But, it was not altogether a matter to boast of, since this house-breaker was such a near relative; and they set themselves to discover some more vulgar thief. Once a month regularly the house was broken into, in their nervous fancies; but as nothing was stolen and these burglars left no marks behind, many of their friends had private doubts about these kind attentions of the thieving fraternity to the Bounce mansion.

Meanwhile, as Sam expressed it, "they had frozen badly onto that precious baby." The poor deserted wife, now made a widow, was not likely to want a comfortable home so long as that child lived, for its old maid grandaunts were perfectly enraptured with it.

"There never was such a child," Miss Maria, would exclaim, as she showed it proudly to some visitor.

"Why, would you believe, it has a tooth coming through already? And look at its hair! I am told by good authority that there never was a child of its age had such a head of hair."

"And to think how heavy it is," chimed in Miss Sophia. "And I really do believe it is going to talk unusually early. I am sure it was trying to say something yesterday. Something like 'mathematics'; only nobody ever heard of a baby commencing with such a word."

There could be no doubt of it. It was a wonderful child. Unfortunately it saw very little of its mother, and the poor woman could only get a chance to hold it when it began to cry. She found herself sometimes wishing that it would cry a little oftener.

Shadow Sam had dropped this handle to his name, and was now Samuel Slocum, Jr. He had, in fact, become an inmate of the Bounce mansion, and one of the circle of admirers of the baby. But, as Sam had had a surfeit of babies in his time, he did not go into very great ecstasies over this. It was very apt to cry very soon after it fell into his hands; and there began to be dark suspicions that Sam was in some way responsible for this infantile grief.

The truth is that Sam, as well as the baby, was now a favored resident in the Bounce mansion. It had been decided, at a solemn conclave of the old ladies, that it was not safe to leave the house without a protector while that precious treasure was in it. And as the Misses Bounce had a most exalted idea of Sam's courage and enterprise, they had fairly bought him away from the elder Slocum.

Sam was no longer a messenger boy. He was exalted to the lofty position of the gentleman of the house in the Bounce edifice, his main duties being to protect the inmates against burglars at night, and to perform certain light labors during the day.

And as the burglars seemed to have heard of this valiant defender, and avoided the house ever afterward, Sam's sleep was not often broken by midnight alarms.

He did not forget the folks at home, however. He made daily visits to that lowly domicile, where he astonished his youthful brothers and sisters with the story of the grandeur of his mansion, and overwhelmed them with his dignity.

Billy Slocum never again had the heart to question Sam's knowledge of geography and other abstruse studies. He felt that a brother of his who could raise himself to such a position by his own talents must know everything. It would be sacrilege to doubt anything that Sam asserted.

At the telegraph office, which Sam also occasionally honored with his visits, the boys were not quite so ready to worship the rising star.

Bill Barly in particular felt envy of Sam's advancement, and was disposed to cavil at the dignity of his old associate.

"There's no use your coming barking round here, Sam Slocum," he would say. "You've got off your uniform, and are living in a big house, but you're Saucy Sam yet, and you can't make yourself anything else," when Sam would retort:

"And if I do live in a big house I don't feel any bigger than the rest of the boys. I ain't that kind. You don't catch me getting set up and proud 'cause I'm among rich folks. But I ain't going to make myself common to please anybody, and if you call it putting on airs 'cause I keep a stiff upper lip, you're welcome. That's my style, and if you don't like it you can scratch dirt till you're tired."

And Sam meant it. He made himself a little gentleman, and the good ladies became in time as proud of him as they were of the baby. Indeed, we have been privately told that Sam was bountifully remembered in their wills.

THE END.

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